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Eleanora Sowerby

PRACTICAL SERMONS

ON

SELECT PASSAGES

OF

SCRIPTURE.

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SELECT PASSAGES

OF

SCRIPTURE.

BY THE REVEREND

THOMAS RUTLEDGE, A.M.

Nullæ majores divitiæ quam fides, quæ cæcos illuminat, ægros curat, martyres coronat, in hæreditate æterna, cum ſanctis Angelis, collocat.

Aug. de Verb. Dom.

If ye love me, keep my commandments. *Jo. xiv.* 15.

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatſoever I command you. *Jo. xv.* 14.

LONDON:

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And ſold by Meſſrs. ROBINSONS, T. CADELL, jun. and W. DAVIES, (Succeſſors to T. CADELL) and T. KAY, London; and W. CREECH, J. DICKSON, and E. BALFOUR, Edinburgh.

MDCCXCIV.

TO

HER GRACE

THE DUCHESS OF BUCCLEUCH.

MADAM,

BEING honoured with permiſſion to dedicate the following Diſcourſes to your Grace, I now beg leave to preſent them as a ſmall teſtimony of my gratitude: but, more eſpecially, as an evidence of the great reſpect which I entertain for your Chriſtian Virtues.--- Would to God that every Order in life were equally adorned!

Senſible that no work of mine can merit the Patronage of ſo illuſtrious a Character,

Character, your Grace's condeſcenſion in patronizing this, at a time when infidelity and irreligion ſo alarmingly prevail, calls forth my warmeſt acknowledgements. If, under your benign auſpices, it ſhall pleaſe the great DIRECTOR of all events, to make the following pages the bleſſed means of enlightening but one darkened mind, of converting one ſinner from the evil of his way, of ſaving one ſoul from death, and of promoting the knowledge, with the practice, of pure and undefiled Religion among men, my view in the publication will be anſwered, and my labour eminently rewarded.

The influence which the example of the Great has on perſons in inferior ſtations, is indeed wonderful.---Were our Nobility,

Nobility, inſtead of entering into the folly and diſſipation of a licentious age, by which Dignity is degraded, and Title rendered contemptible, to imitate the conduct of a few, who are Ornaments to their country, what a happy effect would it have in theſe days, when the commandments of Heaven, and the precepts of Morality, have ſo little power over the hearts and actions of men!

But while the degeneracy of the preſent times is to be deeply regretted, whilſt ſo many are "aſhamed of the Goſpel of Chriſt," it is matter of much conſolation, that there are ſtill ſome, even in the higheſt Circles, who not only make an open profeſſion of Religion, but have the fortitude to defend and ſupport it: and who, by a godly converſation,

converſation, and a virtuous life, moſt conſpicuouſly adorn it.

Whilſt, however, the Chriſtian Virtues entitle the perſon to praiſe, who puts them in practice, ſtill greater honour is due to that ſovereign BEING, who gives both the *deſire* and the *ability* to exerciſe them, for his glory and the benefit of mankind.---It was *Infinite Wiſdom* that raiſed up your Grace, that gifted you with the *inclination* and the *power* to relieve the diſtreſſed; to ſave them that were ready to periſh; to protect the fatherleſs; to ſhield the orphan, and "cauſe the widow's heart to ſing for joy."--From the *Author* of every good and perfect gift your Grace received the means of feeding the hungry, of clothing the naked, and of reviving the ſpirits of

many

many of Chriſt's poor friends:---And, what is of ſtill more value, from the ſame *Source* ſprung that ſympathizing and benevolent ſoul, which incites to the frequent exerciſe of thoſe god-like Virtues, which ſo eminently adorn the character of the DUCHESS OF BUCCLEUGH.

The moſt richly furniſhed of the human race poſſeſs nothing but what they received from above; and, conſequently, have not whereof to boaſt. Nevertheleſs, praiſe is moſt certainly due to, and ought not to be withheld from, thoſe who rightly employ the talents which their divine *Maſter* has intruſted to their management.----With what fidelity, with what attention and care, your Grace has acted your part, as a Steward in God's Houſhold, I aſſuredly know in part:----

But

But---I muſt be ſilent; leſt I ſhould offend that delicacy, that charity, which ſeek to conceal deeds of piety and mercy from the publick eye.

However amiable this diſpoſition may be, I hope your Grace will pardon me in ſaying, That the objects of your beneficence are too numerous for concealment:---And that, however anxiouſly, meek and humble ſpirits may deſire to have a vail caſt over their "works of faith, and labours of love," they ought not to be altogether unnoted and unknown. This is evident from theſe words of our bleſſed Lord, "Let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

That

That the number of God's faithful ſervants may daily increaſe;---that the fair example of piety, of charity, of every domeſtick virtue, which your Grace has given to mankind, may be imitated by many;---that Almighty God, who has made you more eminent by your virtues, than by the exalted ſtation in which he has placed you, may long ſpare you for a bleſſing to your noble Conſort, to your Family, to the World;---and that, when it ſhall pleaſe your heavenly Father to call you hence, He may grant you a triumphant entrance "into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt," and put you in poſſeſſion of that "Crown of life," which fadeth not away, and of that "joy which is unſpeakable and full of glory;"---and, that there may never fail a Deſcendant of the

the illuſtrious Houſes of BUCCLEUCH and MONTAGU, to poſſeſs the Virtues, and inherit the Titles of their pious Anceſtors to the lateſt ages, is the ſincere wiſh and earneſt prayer of,

MADAM,

Your Grace's moſt devoted,

and moſt humble Servant,

THOMAS RUTLEDGE.

Prince's-Square,
July 4, 1794.

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PRACTICAL

PRACTICAL SERMONS

ON

SELECT PASSAGES

OF

SCRIPTURE.

RELIGION,

A SERIOUS AND MOST IMPORTANT CONCERN.

GENESIS XIX 14.

BUT HE SEEMED AS ONE THAT MOCKED UNTO HIS SONS-IN-LAW.

WITH the ſame ſucceſs, that Lot preached to his ſons-in-law, have the Miniſters of the Goſpel, but too often, preached to obſtinate and gainſaying ſinners. The father warned his children of the danger that threatened them: he exhorted them, with the greateſt earneſtneſs, to flee from the habitations of the wicked, leſt they ſhould ſhare in their puniſhment: he entreated them to eſcape ſpeedily from impending danger and deſtruction; but they regarded him not: they ſcoffed at his words, and credited not his aſſertions: *he ſeemed unto them as one that mocked*; and they, of conſequence, were involved in that dreadful ruin from

which they would not eſcape, when they had it in their power.

So is it, and ſo will it ever be, with careleſs and unthinking ſinners. Though daily warned and daily entreated to flee from the wrath to come, and to run quickly to Chriſt, the hiding-place provided for them, where only they can be ſafe from the ſtorms of divine vengeance, yet they will not hearken to the moſt ſalutary counſel: they will not be moved either by the importunities of love, or the threats of inevitable deſtruction. The Heralds of the Goſpel ſeem to them *as one that mocketh:* and the voice of Chriſt, ſtanding at the door of their hearts, and knocking by his *word*, by his *ordinances*, by his *providence*, by his *ſpirit* and their own *conſciences*, is neither heard nor attended to, until they are overtaken by that fearful judgment, and fiery indignation that ſhall devour the adverſaries of the Lord, and overwhelm with everlaſting miſery the deſpiſers of his grace.

Such being the caſe, it is certainly the duty of Chriſt's miniſtring ſervants to labour inceſſantly to convince men, that Religion is a moſt ſerious concern; and that, when they preach to them the doctrines and duties of Chriſtianity, they ſpeak of the moſt important things in the world; things the moſt neceſſary for them

to know: For in compariſon with this all other knowledge is idle, vain, and unimportant. Would to God, that the divine truths of the Goſpel had always a proper weight and influence on thoſe that hear them! And that they may be the bleſſed means of obtaining for us happineſs in this life, and, in the life to come, glory everlaſting.

Be aſſured, my brethren, that the ſubject on which we treat is of the utmoſt conſequence; wherefore let me beg your moſt ſerious attention, whilſt I endeavour to perſuade you, that when the Miniſters of Religion ſet before you the grand truths of the Goſpel, and exhort you to the practice of thoſe duties therein commanded, they mock not, but ſpeak from the fulleſt conviction, and with the greateſt ſerioufneſs.

In farther diſcourſing on theſe words, I propoſe, through the bleſſing of God, FIRST, To make a few obſervations on the Text, and Context.—SECONDLY, I ſhall endeavour to make it evident, that, however fooliſh and unreaſonable the conduct of Lot's ſons-in-law was, there are ſtill a vaſt number of perſons in the world, who imitate them in it; and hear the things concerning God and Religion, as the words *of one that mocketh*.—THIRDLY, I ſhall conſider whence it is, or to what cauſe it is owing, that

the generality of mankind look upon Religion as a thing of ſo little importance; and treat it with ſo much careleſneſs and indifference. And—LASTLY, Take ſome notice of the puniſhment that awaits thoſe who deſpiſe Religion, and make light of the overtures of Grace and Salvation, which God, in mercy, maketh to them, in the Goſpel.

I. We are to make a few obſervations on the Text and Context.

We are informed in the xiiith Chapter of this Book, that Lot, nephew to the patriarch Abraham, had lived in Sodom for ſome time, prior to its deſtruction: The inhabitants of this city, with thoſe of Gomorrah, and the places adjacent, were the moſt abandoned and abominable wretches upon earth. A fertile ſoil, "well watered every where, even as the garden of the Lord," "pride, fulneſs of bread, and abundance of idleneſs," had corrupted them to an aſtoniſhing degree. They indulged themſelves in moſt unnatural luſts, in the gratification of the vileſt paſſions; and carried their exceſſes to ſuch a monſtrous pitch of iniquity, that God determined to deſtroy them at once; and, by fire and brimſtone, to burn up the country, together with its deteſtable inhabitants.

But,

But, as Lot had been kept from the general corruption that reigned in Sodom, ſo, God was willing to preſerve him from the dreadful vengeance he was about to pour down on that devoted city. For this purpoſe he ſent two angels, in human form, who came to Sodom the evening before it was deſtroyed. Being kindly invited into his houſe, and hoſpitably entertained by Lot, they tell him of their errand; and admoniſh him to flee, with all expedition, from the approaching devaſtation.—And, as God is often graciouſly pleaſed to ſhow favour to the friends and relatives of pious men, ſo, by divine permiſſion, the angels were deſirous, for the ſake of righteous Lot, to ſave ſuch of his friends and relations as were expoſed to the ſame danger: Therefore, they ſay unto him, "Haſt thou here any beſides? ſon-in-law, and thy ſons, and thy daughters, and whatſoever thou haſt in the city, bring them out of this place; for we will deſtroy this place; becauſe the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord: and the Lord hath ſent us to deſtroy it."*

Upon hearing this, and believing that what his celeſtial gueſts had foretold would infallibly be accompliſhed, he goes ſtraightway "to his ſons-in-law, who married his daughters, and

* Verſes 12, 13.

ſaid, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will deſtroy this city. But he ſeemed as one that mocked unto his ſons-in-law." Finding them not diſpoſed to hearken to his words, nor to go out of Sodom, he was, no doubt, grieved with their obſtinacy and unbelief; and moſt certainly uſed every argument he could think of, and preſſed them in the warmeſt and moſt affectionate manner, to ſave themſelves and families from certain ruin. But in vain: "he ſeemed unto them as one that mocked."

To what can we impute this? They were certainly perſuaded that Lot ſpake the real ſentiments of his heart; and that he believed what he ſaid: for they could hardly imagine that a man of his well known veracity and piety would invent idle ſtories, wherewith he might impoſe upon them. But as they ſaw no viſible appearance of the threatened deſtruction, and might probably think that his mind was much diſordered, and his imagination over-heated, with the recent attack made upon himſelf, his houſe and family, by the wicked Sodomites, therefore they would not believe; but heard him as an over-credulous man, whoſe words merited little attention.—In this they were highly to blame; nay utterly inexcuſable. The matter of which he ſpake, was far from being of a trivial nature.

The

The danger threatened was great; no leſs than the total overthrow of that city, with all its inhabitants; whilſt the time allowed to flee from it was ſhort: of which circumſtance they were undoubtedly apprized.—Beſides, the wiſdom and probity of Lot, together with his well tried affection for them, ſhould have given force to his words. And, as he not only preſſed them to depart from Sodom, but was about to leave it himſelf, they ought to have paid proper regard to his paternal admonitions.

Add to all this, that what he ſaid was by no means unlikely. They had witneſſed the abominable crimes of the Sodomites; and could not be ignorant that ſuch crimes deſerved the vengeance of a juſt and holy God. What reaſon then could they have for incredulity, when they were told poſitively that God was ready to deſtroy thoſe impious wretches?—If any doubt remained with them, it could only have been, whether God had really threatened, and was determined, to deſtroy Sodom with ſo ſudden a deſtruction. They ſaw not how it could be; and therefore perſuaded themſelves that it would not be.—But this they might have learned, not only from the declaration of the angels ſent to Lot, but alſo from the two remarkable events that ſoon followed their arrival. The one was the vio-

lence offered by the people of Sodom to the angels, whom they took for ſtrangers: And the other was the means by which the angels checked their impious audacity, namely, the ſtriking them with blindneſs. The firſt of theſe ſhould have convinced them that the iniquity of the Sodomites was now full; and the ſecond ſhould have removed all ſuſpicion, and ſatisfied them that the angels were ſent from God.—But had the leaſt ſhadow of doubt ſtill remained, yet, ſurely, their ſafeſt courſe was to have left Sodom, and gone with their father-in-law. And if the city was not deſtroyed, they could then have had an opportunity of returning. But none of theſe conſiderations affected them: Lot ſpake; and they heard him *as one that mocked.*

To what ſhall we aſcribe this ſtrange incredulity of Lot's ſons-in-law? Can we ſuppoſe that they were equally impious and irreligious with the other inhabitants of Sodom? No ſurely; elſe Lot would not have given them his daughters in marriage. But although not ſo wicked as others, yet they might juſtly periſh with them: for they would not believe; nor accept of deliverance, when offered them. They were ſtrongly attached to the world; and could not think of loſing their riches by leaving Sodom, the place in which they lay. This was the

true

true cauſe of their unbelief; and the chief reaſon why they would not take Lot's fatherly advice. His words were ineffectual; he could not prevail upon them to depart; they remained in Sodom, and ſhared in that awful vengeance which God ſent down upon its execrable inhabitants.

As for Lot, at the break of day, the angels took him by the hand and led him forth out of the city, with his wife and his two daughters; who were permitted to paſs on to the little city of Zoar; when, being there in ſafety, "the Lord rained upon Sodom, and upon Gomorrah, brimſtone and fire from the Lord out of Heaven; and he overthrew thoſe cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground;"* turning that fruitful and extenſive valley, into a bituminous lake, about 30 miles long, and 10 broad,† highly offenſive in its ſmell, and without a living creature therein. It is ſometimes called, The dead ſea, at other times, The ſalt ſea;‡ and by the Greeks Aſphaltis, or Aſphaltites; from a kind of pitch or

* Verſes 24, 25.

† According to Joſephus, from the mouth of the river Jordan to Zoar is 66 miles long, and 15 broad.

‡ Gen. xiv. 3.

bitumen,

bitumen, which it caſts up; into this lake the river Jordan runs, and there is loſt.

Thus were theſe wicked cities puniſhed according to their crimes. They burned with unnatural paſſions; and were deſtroyed by preternatural burning: they went after ſtrange fleſh; and were conſumed by ſtrange fire. Then were Lot's ſons-in-law convinced that he had given them ſerious and ſalutary advice:—but it was too late to profit by it. They were involved in the total deſtruction of that devoted city, in which they would obſtinately remain.

From the dreadful cataſtrophe of theſe unhappy cities, let us learn the horrible and deſtructive nature of ſin, which brought ſuch miſery into the world, and entailed ſo many curſes on the human race;—ſin, "the cauſe of all our evils, and of ills itſelf the worſt."—Sin is that abominable thing which God hateth, and which he will not ſuffer always to go unpuniſhed; though for a while he may bear with the wicked, until the cup of their iniquity is full, that he may then puniſh them with the utmoſt ſeverity.

Hence let us alſo learn, how awful the terrors of the Almighty are; and what a dreadful thing it is to fall into the hands of an angry and ſin-avenging God. Let us tremble at the power

of

of his omnipotent arm; and not dare to provoke his rod; leſt he ſwear in his wrath, That we ſhall never enter into his reſt. Let obſtinate and incorrigible ſinners, who now live under the light of the Goſpel, know, that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for them. And juſtly: For as God has favoured us with infinitely more knowledge, with privileges and bleſſings vaſtly ſuperior to whatever the wretched inhabitants of thoſe accurſed cities enjoyed, ſo does he require of us greater holineſs, a more perfect ſervice, and a moſt cheerful obedience to his righteous laws.

Having thus made a few obſervations on our Text and Context, I ſhall, as propoſed in the SECOND place,

II. Endeavour to make it evident, that, however fooliſh and unreaſonable the conduct of Lot's ſons-in-law was, there are ſtill a vaſt number of perſons in the world who imitate them in it; and hear the things concerning God and Religion, as the words *of one that mocketh.*

That Religion is a moſt ſerious and important concern, no man can doubt who conſiders, that by it we are taught the will of God, our Creator; inſtructed in our duty to him; informed

formed how we may obtain his favour, and eſcape his wrath; how we may be happy in time, and bleſſed through eternity. Surely theſe are matters of the utmoſt conſequence to us; and, of courſe, Religion, that diſcovers them, muſt be of all things the moſt important and intereſting; yea, the only, "the one thing needful." Let a man but coolly and deliberately meditate on the truths which the Chriſtian Religion unfolds; let him lay aſide paſſion and prejudice, and baniſh thoſe vain objects which diſtract his attention, and keep him from ſeeing things as they réally are, and which he ought now to view in the ſame light in which he ſhall behold them, when he comes to bid an eternal adieu to all ſublunary enjoyments; let him liſten to the voice of calm and ſound reaſon, enlightened by revelation; to the feelings and dictates of his own conſcience; and then he will moſt certainly be perſuaded that Religion, inſtead of being an impoſition upon the world, is of all things the moſt ſerious and intereſting to mankind.—And it muſt be ſo; elſe God would never have thought it neceſſary to ſend his own dearly beloved Son from heaven to reveal it, to confirm it by ſo many prophecies and miracles, and finally to ſeal the truth thereof with his own blood.

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Is it not then ſurprizing that men, endowed with the powers of reaſon and reflection, ſhould pay ſo little regard to Religion; ſhould look upon it as a thing of nought, and live in the habitual neglect thereof? Doubtleſs.—But, however ſtrange it may appear, nothing is more certain, nothing is more common in the world; as is evident beyond diſpute, both from the *ſentiments* and *conduct* of mankind in general.

That men entertain improper and dangerous notions of Religion is clear as ſun-ſhine, from their treating it as a matter of indifference; and, in effect, declaring that they are under no abſolute neceſſity of complying with all its precepts. God, who "hath no pleaſure in the death of him that dieth," has uſed every mean to warn ſinners of the danger to which they are expoſed. He hath not only ſent his angels, but even his own Son, on this friendly meſſage: and now, by his miniſtring ſervants, he is daily threatening hardened offenders with a deſtruction infinitely more terrible than that which befel the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. And that men may believe and tremble, that they may be perſuaded to flee from the wrath to come, that they may ſee the invincible neceſſity they are under of keeping themſelves from the world, and the pollutions thereof, if they would

would not periſh with the world, the Heralds of the Goſpel ceaſe not to rebuke, to exhort and intreat, ſaying, with Lot, "Up, get you out of this place;" and with Saint Peter, "Save yourſelves from this untoward generation."* But what effect have theſe exhortations?—Perhaps there may be a few, who, touched and awakened by the word of God, take the happy reſolution to get up, and go out of Sodom: that is, to renounce the world with all its pollutions, and, through grace, to ſave their precious ſouls. But alas! by far the greateſt number will not ſeriouſly attend to thoſe warnings. They hear them, as Lot's ſons-in-law did that pious and zealous man, even *as one that mocketh.*

Or, if Chriſt's meſſengers propoſe to men the holy precepts and perfect maxims of the Goſpel, if they enforce purity of life and manners, and preſs home the love of God and our neighbour, if they exhort to the practice of charity, humility, patience, forgiveneſs of injuries, and the like virtues, do they not appear to many as impoſing upon mankind duties too rigid and ſevere? Nay, do not ſome boldly aver, that there is no neceſſity for ſtrictly conforming to their admonitions? If ſuch perſons had juſt notions of Religion, and believed that God ſpake ſeri-

* Acts. ii. 40.

ouſly

ouſly to them in his word, ſurely, they could not entertain ſuch ſentiments.

Doubtleſs, there are a great multitude of profeſſing Chriſtians, who ſeem to have better notions, and juſter ſentiments of Religion; but who, nevertheleſs, reſt contented with a bare profeſſion of their ſentiments, without reducing them to practice. They will approve of what they hear, and acknowledge it to be juſt and true, their conſcience bearing them witneſs, yea, at times, they will form good reſolutions and pious deſigns; but they fail to put them in execution. Are not ſuch perſons more culpable than the others?—Lots ſons-in-law would not depart from Sodom, becauſe they could not believe that what was told them would happen. But thoſe people, though they are perſuaded of the importance of Religion, yet will they not part with the world for its ſake. This is certainly a trifling with the moſt ſacred and weighty concerns; and acting the part of *one that mocketh*.

But that which puts it beyond a doubt, That men do not conſider Religion as a matter of the utmoſt conſequence, is their *life* and *conduct*. Thoſe who remained in Sodom, after they had been warned of their danger, made it apparent that they placed little credit in what was told them.—

them.—And ſo do we, when, in ſpite of all that can be ſaid to perſuade us to repentance and amendment, we continue in a ſtate of impiety. If a ſinner is once thoroughly convinced of the dreadful danger that attends a wicked and ungodly courſe, and is perſuaded that he is going in the way that leadeth to deſtruction, will he continue and perſevere therein with tranquillity and ſatisfaction?—Were men fully ſenſible of the obligations they are under to love, to ſerve and obey God, would they be ſo negligent and careleſs in their duty? Were they properly alarmed at the awful ſtate of impenitent ſinners, would they ſo delay and put off repentance? This delaying of repentance is an evident proof, that what they hear preached, on that ſubject, affects them not; nor leaves any more laſting impreſſion upon their hearts, than if it were an idle tale, or a fooliſh fable. If we ſaw the abſolute neceſſity of being reconciled to God, through a Mediator, would we ſlight the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and his gracious overtures of mercy, as we do? Or, if we really believed that all who live in a ſtate of hatred, envy, malice, and enmity, were under a ſentence of condemnation, would we ſtill perſiſt in the practice of theſe hateful vices? Would we not rather quickly go to our offended brother, confeſs our faults, and

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ſeek to be reconciled unto him; "not ſuffering the ſun to go down upon our wrath?" Theſe certainly are the happy effects which a ſerious attention to a preached Goſpel would produce. But ah! how ſeldom are they viſible! Well may theſe words, which God ſpake to the prophet Ezekiel, concerning his ancient people, be now applied unto us; "Son of man, the children of thy people—ſpeak one to another, every one to his brother, ſaying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh; and they ſit before thee as my people; and they hear thy words but will not do them; for with their mouth they ſhew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetouſneſs. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely ſong of one that hath a pleaſant voice, and can play well on an inſtrument: for they hear thy words, but do them not."*

Thus, Religion is reduced to a bare profeſſion; to a mere ſhadow. Nay, with ſome there is not even that profeſſion or appearance! —Neglected by many, and deſpiſed by not a few, it languiſhes and decays.—Even among thoſe who come to the houſe of God, to pay

* Chap. xxxiii. 30, 31, 32.

him their weekly tribute of devotion, how ſhamefully deficient are many!—Their appearing in his Courts ſeems to be a very irkſome taſk; or why ſo backward? Why loiter away the time elſewhere, till a great part of the ſervice is over? and the *principal* part too; I mean *prayer*.—And of thoſe who actually join in prayer and praiſe, how few do it with that fervency, with that ſincerity and devotion, with which humble ſuppliants ought to approach the throne of the divine Majeſty!—As to hearing of the ſermon, where is that attention which matters of the greateſt moment demand? It is but too frequently obſervable, that, whilſt the Miniſter of God is exhorting, and earneſtly beſeeching ſinners to mind the things that belong to their everlaſting peace, many of them are thinking on ſomething elſe; ſome are gazing around them, examining the dreſs, or the features, of ſuch as are within their view; and often diſturbing the more ſerious part of the audience with their light carriage, their whiſpering, their ſmiling or ſneering; whilſt others are faſt locked in the arms of ſleep! To ſuch is not the Word of the Lord a ſport, a wearineſs, and at beſt, a thing of no importance; and his Miniſters as men that mock?——Indeed, my friends, there is but too much reaſon to think, that

that many perform theſe external acts of Religion merely through cuſtom and form; and that all they do is little better than hypocriſy and grimace. And how can we think otherwiſe; when it is evident that they bring neither devotion, nor elevation of heart, nor even a ſerious attention along with them?—In thus ſpeaking, perhaps you may think me harſh and uncharitable: but I appeal to your own conſciences for the truth of what I have ſaid.

Do but obſerve in what a very different manner men intereſt themſelves in the affairs of this world, and in thoſe of the world to come; and you will ſoon be convinced that they look upon Religion as no ſerious or weighty concern. In worldly matters, we are active and aſſiduous; we grudge not, day and night, to labour and contrive how we may amaſs wealth, attain preferments, and enjoy eaſe with pleaſure.—But, as to the buſineſs of eternity and the life to come, that is forgot, or put off until another time: and the moſt favourable opportunities for laying up treaſure in heaven, are ſuffered to ſlip away unnoted, or diſregarded. Year after year, yea, the whole life, is ſpent without either ardour or activity being ſhown in the great work of the ſoul's ſalvation!—Whence comes it that men act in this fooliſh and unaccountable

him their weekly tribute of devotion, how ſhamefully deficient are many!—Their appearing in his Courts ſeems to be a very irkſome taſk; or why ſo backward? Why loiter away the time elſewhere, till a great part of the ſervice is over? and the *principal* part too; I mean *prayer*.—And of thoſe who actually join in prayer and praiſe, how few do it with that fervency, with that ſincerity and devotion, with which humble ſuppliants ought to approach the throne of the divine Majeſty!—As to hearing of the ſermon, where is that attention which matters of the greateſt moment demand? It is but too frequently obſervable, that, whilſt the Miniſter of God is exhorting, and earneſtly beſeeching ſinners to mind the things that belong to their everlaſting peace, many of them are thinking on ſomething elſe; ſome are gazing around them, examining the dreſs, or the features, of ſuch as are within their view; and often diſturbing the more ſerious part of the audience with their light carriage, their whiſpering, their ſmiling or ſneering; whilſt others are faſt locked in the arms of ſleep! To ſuch is not the Word of the Lord a ſport, a wearineſs, and at beſt, a thing of no importance; and his Miniſters as men that mock?——Indeed, my friends, there is but too much reaſon to think,

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manner?—The anſwer to this queſtion ſhall ſerve for the THIRD general head of our diſcourſe.

III. Without enlarging on the depravity of human nature, and the great averſion that we conſequently have to holineſs, we ſhall find, upon enquiry, that much of this careleſſneſs and indifference, about the concerns of a future ſtate, is owing both to the *Teachers* of Religion, and thoſe that are *taught*; to the Preachers of the Goſpel, and them who hear it.—The *former* either preach not with that ſeriouſneſs, and that earneſtneſs which they ought; or the *latter* hear not with proper attention, and with the real ſpirit of devotion.

When Miniſters of the Goſpel would affect their auditory they muſt be affected themſelves. They muſt addreſs them with the ſame earneſtneſs, as Lot did his ſons-in-law, when he ſaid, "Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will deſtroy this city." He believed, and was himſelf moved with what he ſpake: "For that righteous man dwelling among" the deteſtable inhabitants of that place, "in ſeeing and hearing, vexed his righteous ſoul, from day to day, with their unlawful deeds *."

* 2 Peter, ii. 8.

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vinced of their wickedneſs, and alarmed by the fearful judgment about to fall on that abominable city, he thought of nothing but leaving it in haſte; and he greatly preſſed his ſons-in-law, to follow him. So ſhould the Miniſters of Religion be perſuaded of, and affected by, the truths they declare unto others; that, with St. Paul, they may be able to ſay, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we perſuade men: but we are made manifeſt unto God; and, I truſt alſo, are made manifeſt in your conſciences*." When Chriſtian Paſtors are filled with faith and piety, with love to Chriſt and his flock; when their moſt ardent deſire is the ſalvation of ſouls; —when, by the Spirit of God, they ſpeak out of the abundance of their hearts, then will they appear earneſt in what they ſay; and that which comes from the heart will go to the heart. Without this ſerioufneſs, our ſermons, however well ſtudied, will be cold, lifeleſs, and unaffecting. If we would profit our hearers, our compoſitions ſhould be grave and ſolemn, plain and perſpicuous, free from the vain and unbecoming ornaments of worldly eloquence; yet ſuch as will not diſgrace the beautiful, the elegant ſimplicity of the inſpired writings. If we act otherwiſe, we make the pulpit a ſtage, Re-

* 2 Cor. v. 2.

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ligion a comedy, and, in the preſence of God and man, ſport with things the moſt ſacred and divine. In ſo doing we may ſeek to preach ourſelves; but not "Chriſt Jeſus the Lord."

Another, and, I am greatly afraid, too well-founded a reaſon, why ſo many look upon Religion as a thing of little conſequence, is the diſagreement, ſo frequently viſible, between the words and actions, the public diſcourſes and private converſation, the profeſſion and practice of ſome of the Teachers of Chriſtianity.—It behoves a Miniſter of the New Teſtament "to ſhow himſelf a pattern of good works: in doctrine ſhewing uncorruptneſs, gravity, ſincerity, ſound ſpeech that cannot be condemned."* —But the dreſs of a fop, the gait of a mountebank, the converſation of a libertine, and the aſſociating with profane ſcoffers, do but ill agree with that gravity, ſincerity, ſound ſpeech, and holy practice which the Apoſtle recommends.—Such a demeanor will never do honour to the cauſe of Chriſt, nor make proſelytes to his divine Religion.—On the contrary, it confirms the infidel in his infidelity, the ſcoffer in his profanity, and the ſinner in his wickedneſs, making them tenfold more the children of the devil than they were before!—This was not God's

* Titus ii. 7, 8.

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deſign in appointing a Goſpel-Miniſtry: and wo is unto us if we thwart the counſels of the Almighty, and are found fighting againſt God.

If, therefore, we would have the world believe that we are ſerious in what we preach, our actions muſt accord to our words. Lot exhorted his ſons-in-law to go out of Sodom: and what he adviſed them to do, he did himſelf; leaving behind him his wealth and worldly ſubſtance. To practiſe what we preach is a moſt powerful argument to convince men that we are really in earneſt. To be the ſame in the pulpit and out of it; to be always zealous for the glory of God, and the ſalvation of ſinners; full of piety, brotherly love and charity; willing to ſpend, and be ſpent in the ſervice of Chriſt and his Church, will procure us love and eſteem from all good men; and even command reſpect and reverence from the moſt profligate. By the conſtant exerciſe of theſe virtues, we ſhall be able to acquit our own conſciences, and leave thoſe totally without excuſe, who hear our words, as the words of *one that mocketh.*

But remember, my brethren, that the fault is not always on the ſide of Miniſters: you will find it more frequently on that of their hearers. Lot ſpake ſeriouſly and earneſtly to his ſons-in-law; but they would not hearken unto him:

And ſuch is the caſe ſtill. The Preachers of the Goſpel often addreſs their auditors in the fulneſs and ſincerity of their hearts: and yet they are liſtened unto as men that mock.

Among the many reaſons, why men pay ſo little attention to Religion, we may reckon their want of *faith*, or a firm belief of the divinity and truth of the Goſpel, one of the chief.—That there ſhould be infidels and unbelievers among the ſtupid and groſsly ignorant part of mankind, may not appear wonderful. But that ſo many of this character ſhould be found among men of the brighteſt parts, and that they ſhould employ their ſuperior abilities to combat and diſcredit Religion, is aſtoniſhing; and can hardly be accounted for, unleſs by ſuppoſing them to have hearts more than commonly depraved. It is ſurprizing what pains ſome men will take in publiſhing doctrines the moſt pernicious, and ſentiments the moſt dangerous; equally repugnant to faith, as ſubverſive of morality. There is ſcarcely a truth in Chriſtianity which the wit and impudence of libertines have not attacked. Yea, unſatisfied with their infidelity alone, they add thereto impiety and profanity; making a jeſt of things ſacred, and turning the oracles of Heaven into ridicule: therein imitating thoſe profane ſcoffers mentioned by St. Peter, who

ſaid, "Where is the promiſe of his coming?*" No wonder that ſuch look upon Religion as a matter of no conſequence.

But the declared infidel, and the openly profane compoſe not the bulk of thoſe who reap no benefit from a preached Goſpel.—It is to be feared that there are too many, even of thoſe who profeſs to know God, and Jeſus Chriſt whom he hath ſent, who have not a true faith. And how ſhould they have it, when they never gave themſelves any concern to know what Religion is? That inſtruction, which would, by the bleſſing of God, have made them wiſe unto ſalvation, was not given them in the ſeaſon of youth: Religion was not ſet before them, in the early part of their life, in that beauty, in that light, and with that energy, which would have made it appear worthy of their love, their eſteem and affection. That eſſential duty was neglected: and it ſeldom happens that perſons, who know little of Religion in their youth, ever have any thing better than ſuperficial notions of it; and theſe often falſe. Thoſe that are advanced in life ſtudy it ſtill leſs. They are carried away by their paſſions; they are immerſed in buſineſs; and the cares of the world ſoon diminiſh the little knowledge they had of it;

* 2 Pet. iii. 4.

until,

until, by degrees, it is entirely effaced from their memories. It is therefore not ſo aſtoniſhing, that the Miniſters of the Goſpel make but a faint impreſſion upon them.

But the grand reaſon, the chief cauſe, why men are ſo inattentive to Religion, and ſo regardleſs of futurity, is their *love to the world*, and their inordinate fondneſs for ſenſual enjoyments. The true cauſe why Lot's ſons-in-law would not believe in the deſtruction of Sodom, nor go out of that devoted city, was their love to it, and the things which they therein poſſeſſed. Religion, and an immoderate love to the world, are directly in oppoſition; and it is utterly impoſſible for us to gratify our ſenſual appetites, and, at the ſame time, to lay up ſpiritual treaſures. Although there are a thouſand reaſons to convince us of the vanity of all terreſtrial enjoyments, and to prove the folly, the madneſs and danger of ſetting our hearts upon them, yet we are, in general, as much attached to them, as if they were the only affairs of importance, and alone worthy of our ſerious attention.—Such, my brethren, are the weeds, and ſuch the tares, which choke the good ſeed of the Word, and render it unfruitful.—But we muſt haſten to the LAST thing propoſed in the method, namely.

IV. To

IV. To take ſome notice of the puniſhment of thoſe who deſpiſe Religion, and make light of the overtures of grace and ſalvation, which God, in mercy, maketh to them in the Goſpel.

It was a ſore complaint which God formerly made of his ancient people, That "they would not hearken to his voice, and Iſrael would have none of him."* The compaſſionate Jeſus did likewiſe complain, That ſinners would not come unto him, that they might have life.†—And ſtill may the Miniſters of Chriſt complain, That few have believed their report; that few have opened the ear to inſtruction; that their moſt ſerious and earneſt exhortations to flee from the wrath to come, have been received as the words of *one that mocketh.*

But what ſhall the end of this be?—Shall worldlings, ſhall profane, thoughtleſs, and grace-deſpiſing ſinners, always paſs unpuniſhed?—No; our God will come "clothed with the garments of vengeance; and clad with zeal, as with a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adverſaries, a recompenſe to his enemies."‡—That which befel Lot's ſons-in-law will alſo be their portion. They would not believe that the Patriarch ſpake ſeriouſly to them; or that Sodom was to be

* Pſal. lxxxi. 11. † Jo. v. 40. ‡ Iſa. lix. 17, 18.

deſtroyed,

deſtroyed, until the fiery ſtorm deſcended, until the city blazed, and all the adjacent territory was in flames. Then were they cured of their infidelity; then they repented of their folly in rejecting the ſalutary counſel given them; but it was too late: there was no way left to eſcape. So ſhall it finally be with the wicked and the ungodly.

Remember, my brethren, that the dreadful fate of Sodom, and the cities of the plain, is a real repreſentation of what ſhall befal the unbelieving and impenitent world at the laſt day. The ſovereign Judge of all fleſh hath himſelf declared it, in theſe words, "As it was in the days of Lot, they did eat, they drank, they bought, they ſold, they planted, they builded; but the ſame day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimſtone from heaven, and deſtroyed them all. Even thus ſhall it be, in the day when the Son of Man is revealed."*

Ah chriſtians! Think how hapleſs the preſent and future ſtate of thoſe who ſlight and deſpiſe the offers of ſalvation! They cannot ſay, That they were not warned of their danger; for they are, time after time, entreated to flee from it: but they will not hearken. When

* Luke, xvii. 28.

the

the meſſengers of God ſpeak to them on that ſubject, they are counted as *one that mocketh*. Notwithſtanding all that can be ſaid, they continue in their old courſe; they keep in the ſame path, as if they had nothing to fear; and proceed in the ſame manner, as if all the threatenings denounced againſt the wicked, were to them words of no meaning or importance.—But, O Heaven! what an alarming change will take place, when their righteous Judge, arrayed in awful terrors, ſhall pronounce an irrevocable ſentence of condemnation upon them! The diſmal end of the wretched inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, who were involved in the ſulphurious and fiery ſtorm that burnt up their cities, is nothing in compariſon, to that horror and deſpair with which the wicked ſhall be ſeized in the great and terrible day of the Lord! Then ſhall Religion appear a ſerious and important buſineſs; and unthinking ſinners ſhall mock no more.

Be not deceived, my friends; for though you ſhould pay no regard to our meſſage, and even hold the meſſengers in contempt, yet, this cannot change the nature of things, nor make God a liar. He "is not mocked; for whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap." He ſpeaks to you ſeriouſly; and will as ſeriouſly execute

execute his judgments.—And when the Almighty ariſeth in judgment, "Where ſhall the ungodly and the ſinner appear?"

But it is no uncommon thing for ſcorners, and ſcoffers of Religion, before they leave the world, to have other views, and to entertain ſentiments very different, from thoſe they once profeſſed.—When the dark clouds of affliction are gathering over them; when ſickneſs and diſeaſe throw them upon a bed of languiſhing and pain; when death makes his viſible approaches; when the world haſtens to diſappear; when the hitherto ſleeping conſcience awakes; then ſhall the deſpiſers of grace, and the contemners of Religion, begin to ſee things as they really are: then ſhall they perceive what is the dreadful end of them "that know not God, and that obey not the Goſpel of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt."

Have pity on yourſelves, O ye careleſs ſinners, who are now at eaſe in the midſt of danger! Still, through the mercy of God, you enjoy the day of grace, and the means of ſalvation. Shake off that ſtupor, that ſloth, with which your ſpiritual man hath been ſo long ſeized: awake from the ſleep of carnal ſecurity, and hearken to the word of life,—to the voice of conſcience,—to the exhortations of thoſe who

come

come to you with meſſages of peace and love, beſeeching you to be reconciled to God,—to ceaſe from hoſtilities againſt the Almighty,—and to deſiſt from hurrying on your own deſtruction.

May theſe moſt ſerious, moſt certain, and important truths, now delivered, ſink deep into your hearts; and make a laſting impreſſion upon them.—May the bleſſed effects which they ought to produce, be manifeſt in your future life and converſation, to the lateſt period of your earthly exiſtence.—And may they be the happy means of obtaining "the end of your faith, even the ſalvation of your ſouls." Amen.

GOD's

SERMON II.

GOD's LAW
THE DELIGHT OF HIS SAINTS.

PSALM, I. 2.

BUT HIS DELIGHT IS IN THE LAW OF THE LORD.

IN this Pſalm we find the quinteſſence of all true Religion. It is ſhort, as to the compoſition; but extenſive, as to the matter therein contained. It may, with great propriety, be called, *The Chriſtian's Guide*, ſeeing it moſt clearly points out the dangerous road that leads to miſery and deſtruction; and likewiſe the ſafe path which conducts to life and glory everlaſting. In fine, it may juſtly be denominated, *An Abridgment of Chriſtianity*.

This divine hymn begins with pronouncing a bleſſing upon the righteous man, who is deſcribed *negatively*, by three particulars. *Firſt*, "He walketh not in the counſel of the ungodly;"—*Secondly*, "He ſtandeth not in the way of ſinners;"—And, *Thirdly*, "He ſitteth not in the ſeat of the ſcornful."—He hates

the crooked ways of ſin; and will not join in the counſels of ſuch as walk therein. He will not *ſtand* among thoſe who cannot ſtand before God in judgment: nor *ſit* with the impious and profane, who make a mock at ſin, who ſcoff at Religion, and are hardened in their iniquity. He may traffick, but not aſſociate with ſuch; he may behave courteouſly to them; but will not be joined with them in the bonds of friendſhip.

But, as the character of a godly man would be imperfect, were it repreſented as only *negatively* good, the Pſalmiſt paints him in the text, as *poſitively* ſo. He doth not only ſhun the counſel of the ungodly, the way of ſinners, and the ſeat of the ſcornful, "but his delight is in the law of the Lord: and in his law doth he meditate day and night."—He doth not, like too many in the world, think that Religion conſiſts wholly in *negatives*; and that becauſe he is not guilty of the greateſt immoralities, he may bleſs himſelf, and, with the vaunting Phariſee, ſay, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjuſt, adulterers, or even "as this publican."*—Doubtleſs, it is good to abſtain from ſin, and to ceaſe from evil; but that will not be a ſufficient recommendation in the ſight of God, if we neglect to do good. It

* Luke, xviii. 11.

will

will not ſatisfy an enlightened conſcience, on the proſpect of death and diſſolution, that he hath done injury to no man; that he hath been guilty of no groſs or heinous crime. So far it is well: but if we have done no good, if we have not performed the work aſſigned us in our Lord's vineyard; we muſt loſe our pay, and forfeit our reward.

In further diſcourſing on this ſubject, we propoſe—FIRST, To conſider what is meant by the *Law of the Lord*, and *delighting* in it.—SECONDLY, To enquire *whence* it is that the Righteous derive this ſpiritual delight in God's law.—THIRDLY, To point out ſome of the *marks*, or *ſigns*, by which we may know if we really poſſeſs this ſacred joy and delight.——FOURTHLY, To ſhow you by what *means* a Chriſtian may arrive at this holy delight in the Law of the Lord.—And, LASTLY, To uſe a few *motives*, or *arguments*, to perſuade you to ſeek after this ſacred delight in Religion.

And may the God of all grace open the eyes of our underſtanding, to ſee the wonders of his Law, the holineſs and beauty of his Precepts, the richneſs and magnitude of his Promiſes, that our ſouls may thereby be filled with admiration and deſire, with love, with joy, and delight;

that, like David, we may make it our meditation day and night.

I. We are to conſider what is meant by *the Law of the Lord*, and *delighting* in it.—The word *Law* may be taken, either in a limited, or an extenſive meaning. In its limited ſenſe, it ſignifies the Decalogue, or ten moral precepts, which God delivered to Moſes on Mount Sinai:* And ſometimes, only the ſecond table of that Law.†—In its more extenſive meaning, it ſignifies all the divine Precepts, whether moral, ceremonial, or judicial.‡ In our text, it comprehends the whole written Word of God; as revealed by him to his church; and which includes every part of Religion, both as to *faith* and *practice*.

As to a Saint's *delighting* in the Law of the Lord, we may obſerve, That it comes not from a natural *inſtinct*, which every creature poſſeſſes; and which cauſes it to delight in ſomething or other; but from a divine *inſpiration*. The godly man ſerves the Lord from an ingenuous principle: his heart, his will, his inclinations are all towards his Law. His ſervice is voluntary; therefore delightful. He reckons it more a privilege than a duty; a recreation rather than a taſk.—And though he cannot ſerve

* Rom. ii. 25. † Rom. xiii. 8. ‡ Jo. i. 17. God

God perfectly, yet he does it cheerfully.—This has been the caſe with ſaints in all ages. David made the Law of the Lord his delight, and preferred it to thouſands of gold and ſilver.* Paul delighted in the Law of God after the inward man.†—And, like them, every true Chriſtian will therein rejoice. A gracious ſoul takes pleaſure in every thing that has the ſtamp of God upon it.—The Sabbath is his delight;—the reading and hearing of the Word;—Prayer and the Sacrament are his delight;—and on thoſe feſtival days when "the Lord of Hoſts makes unto his people a feaſt of fat things, a feaſt of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined," he flies to the banqueting-houſe, on the wings of delight, where Chriſt diſplays his banner of love, and entertains him with celeſtial delicacies; where the great Maſter of the Feaſt pours the oil of gladneſs into his heart, and gives him the moſt endearing tokens of his affection.

Here a queſtion may be aſked, which well deſerves a ſerious anſwer. May not even a renewed ſoul ſerve God in languor and wearineſs, without feeling any ſuch pleaſure as that now mentioned?—Doubtleſs he may; and yet be not totally void of pleaſing ſenſations. Though

* Pſal. cxix. 72. † Rom. vii. 22.

his graces be weak, and his corruptions ſtrong, by which this wearineſs and liſtleſsneſs are occaſioned, ſtill his heart, his will, is for God; and he poſſeſſes a certain complacency in him. As a man may greatly delight in ſome particular ſciences, or recreations, and yet, in times of bodily indiſpoſition, may ceaſe to reliſh them; ſo a child of God, when bowed down with the fleſh, and oppreſſed by a weight of corruption, may ſometimes find his ſpirits flag in the ways of righteouſneſs, and even a diſreliſh thereto enſue; yet ſtill entertain a high eſteem and reſpect for them.

Beſides, this liſtleſsneſs, in a true Chriſtian, is altogether involuntary. When he feels his diſeaſe he is grieved; he mourns, and goes on heavily under it: At the ſame time he uſes every lawful means to get rid of it, and to attain his former alacrity in the ſervice of his divine Maſter.—He reads the promiſes, he prays, he wreſtles with God; and, with the pious ſon of Jeſſe, cries for quickening grace.* Nor will he deſiſt, until he has recovered that freedom of ſoul, and that delight in the Law of the Lord which he formerly poſſeſſed.—And I may add,

That this coldneſs, this liſtleſsneſs in duty, is never conſtant, or habitual, in a regenerated

* Pſal. cxix. 25, 88, 149.

perſon

perſon. When it is low water in a Believer's ſoul, he may find that he makes no progreſs towards the deſired haven; and be ſenſible of a diſinclination to that which is good: But ſoon the ſpring-tide of affection returns; and he is carried, as it were, with full ſail, through holy duties, towards the bliſsful coaſts of Immanuel's country.—As a ſick man, while labouring under his diſeaſe, loathes his food; but, as ſoon as health returns, receives it with pleaſure; ſo the Chriſtian, while under ſadneſs and melancholy, may have little reliſh for the Word, for Sacraments, for Prayer or Praiſe: But, when cured of his ſpiritual malady, his appetite returns; and he finds a double pleaſure in all his enjoyments, with a ſuperior delight in the Law of his God.—But I proceed, as propoſed, in the SECOND place,

II. To enquire, *whence* it is that the Righteous derive this ſpiritual delight in God's Law:—And,

1ſt. It proceeds from a ſound *underſtanding*, and a well informed *judgment*, which enable a man to ſee ſuch beauty and propriety in the divine Precepts, as to captivate his heart and affections.—A renewed man is entirely ſatisfied that the Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the

the ſoul: *that* the Teſtimony of the Lord is ſure, making wiſe the ſimple: *that* the Statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: *that* the Commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes: *that* the Fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: *that* the Judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether: more to be deſired than gold, yea, than much fine gold: ſweeter alſo than honey, and the honeycomb!"*—Thus beholding ſuch beauty, ſuch majeſty, and abſolute perfection in God's Law, and alſo taſting ſo much ſweetneſs therein, no wonder that it becomes his joy and his delight. But,

2dly. This ſpiritual delight ariſes from the aſcendency which *Grace* has gained over *Corruption* in the heart of a renewed man.—Whilſt in our natural and unrenewed ſtate, we have no deſire after godlineſs; nay, we have a great averſion to it: "Therefore," with the wicked, "we ſay unto God, Depart from us, for we deſire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him? Or what profit ſhould we have, if we pray unto him?"†—But no ſooner does Grace take poſſeſſion of the heart than a wonderful change enſues. Corruptions are vanquiſhed,—the ſtubborn,

* Pſal. xix. 7, &c. † Job xxi. 14.

will

will ſubdued,—enmity and rebellion cruſhed,—and the whole man brought into ſubjection to the Law of Chriſt! Hatred is turned into love; and diſlike into delight! He is quite another ſpirit: and henceforth he ſerves his God with cheerfulneſs and pleaſure. Thus does ſovereign Grace make a willing people in the day of Jehovah's power!

3dly. This ſacred delight in the Law of the Lord ariſes from the happy *proſpect*, yea, the *aſſurance*, of a glorious immortality, which it reveals;—and alſo, from the well-founded expectation of receiving the rewards therein promiſed to all God's faithful ſervants in the world to come.—A kingdom that cannot be removed,—a crown of glory that fadeth not away,—an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled,—life and joy everlaſting.—Theſe, my brethren, theſe are rewards indeed!—rewards infinitely beyond our conception; and infinitely above our merit! No wonder that the bliſsful proſpect, of the ſure and perpetual poſſeſſion of theſe, cheers the Chriſtian under all his labours; and makes the road of duty, not only ſmooth and eaſy, but pleaſant and delightful.

Having thus briefly enquired *whence* it is that the Righteous derive this ſpiritual delight in the Law

Law of the Lord;—I ſhall now, as propoſed in the THIRD place,

III. Point out ſome of the *marks*, or *ſigns*, by which we may know, with certainty, if we really poſſeſs this ſacred delight in God's Law: which knowledge is of the utmoſt importance. And,

1ſt. The ſoul that really delights in God's Law is perpetually thinking and meditating upon it.—To whatever thing a man's inclination leads him, therein does he delight. The ſordid miſer delights in his gold; the voluptuary in his pleaſures; the philoſopher in his reſearches; and the mind of each is chiefly occupied with that on which his heart is ſet.—So it is with a lover of God's Law. He is continually pondering on ſome, or other, of its parts. When he finds what a rich treaſure it contains, he is filled with admiration: When he beholds its wiſdom, its juſtice, and its holineſs, he is deeply impreſſed with a ſacred awe and a profound reverence. But when he ſees how precious, and taſtes how ſweet thoſe Goſpel promiſes are, which contain, and which convey life and comfort into the ſoul, he is therewith enraptured: It engroſſes the whole of his affections; and is always uppermoſt in his thoughts.

2dly. The man who truly delights in the Law of the Lord, will not only be continually thinking upon it, but frequently making it the pleaſing ſubject of his converſation.—Like the pious Iſraelites, mentioned by the Prophet Malachi, the ſaints "ſpeak often to one another."* And, like David, are not aſhamed to ſpeak of God's Teſtimonies, even before kings.† If the heart delights in the divine Statutes, it will appear by the words; and the tongue will be as the pen of a ready writer, to mark its ſentiments.—This we find exemplified in the Spouſe, who could not conceal her love, but broke forth into the moſt elegant and pathetic deſcription of the perſon and graces of him whom her ſoul loved, ſaying, "My beloved is white and ruddy, the chiefeſt among ten thouſand. His head is as the moſt fine gold:—Yea, he is altogether lovely ‡"—This we find likewiſe verified in the diſciples, whoſe hearts were ſo ſet upon Chriſt, that they made him the ſubject of their converſation, during their journey from Jeruſalem to Emaus.—Again,

3dly. If we really delight in God, we will be ſtrict and punctual in obſerving all the religious Ordinances which he hath appointed. The reading and ſtudying of the ſacred Oracles, prayer

* Malac. iii. 16 † Pſal. cxix. 46. ‡ Cant. v. 10.

and

and praiſe, with a frequent commemoration of the ſufferings and death of Jeſus, will be neglected on no account. We will rejoice when it is ſaid, "Let us go into the houſe of the Lord:" Nor will every trifling occurrence, every ſilly pretext keep us from waiting upon God, in the place where he hath appointed to meet with his people. We will encompaſs his holy altar with the voice of gladneſs; and offer thereon, not the halt and the blind, the lame and the ſick, but "the fat of the flock;" the warmeſt zeal, the pureſt love, with the moſt ſincere obedience: And, after doing all in our power, will grieve that we cannot do more; yea, bluſh to think how poor, how mean our beſt ſacrifices are.—The Spouſe, delighting in Chriſt, gives him "of her pleaſant fruits;" and "cauſes him to drink of the ſpiced wine, of the juice of her pomegranate." So is it with every true Believer. If he has one thing better than another, his Lord ſhall have it: nor will he, with the hypocrite, ſerve his God with that which coſt him nothing: he will preſent him with the ſtrength of his affections, the love of his heart, his ſoul and mind.

But ah! my brethren, how very different is it with many profeſſing Chriſtians among us, who look upon all as loſt that is given to God,

or

laid out for the ſupport of his miniſtring ſervants: who reckon the ſervice of his ſanctuary a wearineſs, a labour, and a toil: who are glad when the Devil helps them to an excuſe for abſenting themſelves from the worſhipping aſſemblies of his people!—What ſhall we ſay of ſuch?—Surely there is nothing of this holy delight in them. Let all ſuch aſſuredly know, That theſe ſervices are no leſs a wearineſs to God than to them. When duties are a burthen to us, they are no leſs ſo to the Almighty. He is ſick of ſuch ſervices; and will reject them with anger and abhorrence.

4thly. The ſoul that truly delights in God will have little pleaſure in any thing elſe.—Like Paul, the world will be crucified unto him, and he unto the world. Not but that a Chriſtian may rejoice in the good things which his Lord giveth him. None has ſo good a right to enjoy them with comfort and ſatisfaction; for they have their heavenly Father's bleſſing along with them. But, although they are thankful for earthly enjoyments, yet theſe never engroſs their heart and affections. They uſe the things of this world as not abuſing them; making them ſerve as neceſſary helps and comforts, during the time of their ſojourning in this ſtrange land. They look upon the earth more as an

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Inn for a night's lodging, than a permanent reſidence. And true it is, That a Believer, who hath taſted that the Lord is good, and once feaſted on Chriſt's ſweetneſs, will not much reliſh the huſks of this world; nor have any violent deſire after ſublunary enjoyments.

Laſtly. Another ſure mark of this ſpiritual delight, is its *conſtancy* and *duration*. Like the fire of the Altar it never goes out. It is not always equally bright; nor does it, at all times, produce equally pleaſant ſenſations. It has its ebbs and floods; but is never loſt entirely. Afflictions may cool its ardour, and leſſen its force; but cannot exterminate or deſtroy it. This we find verified from theſe words of Jeſſe's pious ſon, "Trouble and anguiſh have taken hold on me; yet thy commandments are my delight."* Thus it is not with hypocritical profeſſors. Theſe may have flaſhes of joy, and ſenſations of delight in Religion; but they are tranſient and ſoon over. The Jews were willing to rejoice in John's light for a ſeaſon; but their rejoicing was of ſhort duration. Like them, unſound hearts may for a time delight in the Law of the Lord; but ere long they change, and pronounce it a wearineſs and a burthen.

Having given you theſe *marks*, or *ſigns*, by

* Pſalm cxix. 143.

which

which you may certainly know if you poſſeſs this ſacred delight in God and his Law,—I ſhall next, as propoſed, in the FOURTH place,

IV. Endeavour to ſhow you by what *means* a Chriſtian may arrive at this holy delight in the Law of the Lord.—And,

1ſt. In order to obtain this ſacred delight in God's Law, you muſt ceaſe to take delight in ſin.—Before you can be Chriſt's faithful ſervants, you muſt renounce allegiance to Satan, and throw off his ſhameful yoke: "for no man can ſerve two maſters." You cannot poſſibly delight in the Lord, and rejoice in his ſtatutes, while ſin remains unmortified in the heart. "If I regard iniquity in my heart," ſays David, "the Lord will not hear me."* While God keeps aloof from us, while he ſhuts his ear againſt our ſupplications, and deprives us of communion *with* him, we cannot have complacency and joy *in* him. Sin is that baneful poiſon which kills our ſpiritual comforts, and deprives us of our choiceſt bleſſings. Therefore, if you would have your Lord's teſtimonies to be ſweet unto your taſte, wickedneſs muſt not be ſweet in your mouth, nor ſuffered to lie hid under your tongue. You muſt deteſt

* Pſalm lxvi. 18.

and

and abhor iniquity, before you can delight in holineſs, and view Chriſt as precious.

2d. That you may arrive at this holy delight in Religion, be often, be earneſt, be importunate at a Throne of Grace for the powerful aid of the Holy Spirit, to change your hearts, to ſpiritualize your affections, and make you a new man in Chriſt Jeſus: for, whilſt the heart remains carnal and earthly, it will have no reliſh for things divine. You muſt have a ſpiritual appetite before you can feaſt on God's word and ordinances; But, having that, then will they be to you "the joy and rejoicing of your heart."

3d. If you would attain this ſacred delight in the Law of the Lord, you muſt have the higheſt veneration and eſteem for the infallible oracles of Heaven; the ſuperlative excellence of which your underſtanding muſt be convinced of, before your affections will embrace them. David prized God's ſtatutes more than all riches: And hence it was that he ſo highly valued, and ſo ardently loved them. "I," ſays he, "will delight myſelf in thy ſtatutes: I will not forget thy word."* And if ever you come to be in David's frame of ſoul, and can ſpeak as he ſpake, then will you find delight animating and inciting you to duty. When

* Pſalm cxix. 16.

this

this is the caſe, bleſs God for his efficacious grace that enables you to run without wearying, and to walk without fainting in the way of his commandments. Perſevere therein, even unto the end; and you ſhall be ſaved. "Delight thyſelf in the Lord, and he ſhall give thee the deſires of thine heart."*—But I haſten to the FIFTH, and laſt thing propoſed in the method, namely,

V. To uſe a few *motives* or *arguments*, to perſuade you to ſeek after this holy delight in Religion, or the Law of the Lord:—All of which I ſhall comprehend in two general, but weighty conſiderations.—*Firſt*, Becauſe there is in Religion every thing that can promote true happineſs, and give real pleaſure.—*Second*, Becauſe delight therein crowns and completes all our ſervices.

1ſt. That there is in Religion every thing that can promote our happineſs, and give us real pleaſure, is manifeſt, if we conſider what it *is*, and what it *contains*. It is, as Gregory ſtiles it, "An *Epiſtle* from the Almighty God to the Creature," dictated by the Holy Ghoſt, and ſealed with the blood of Chriſt. It is not only full of truth and grace, but replete with the

* Pſalm xxxvii. 4.

ſweeteſt, the moſt endearing expreſſions of love and affection. Attend to one or two paſſages in this love epiſtle. "I," ſays God, "I have loved thee with an everlaſting love; therefore with loving kindneſs have I drawn thee."*—"As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, ſo ſhall thy God rejoice over thee."†—"I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteouſneſs, and in judgment, and in loving-kindneſs, and in mercies."‡—"I will keep thee in all places whither thou goeſt:—for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have ſpoken to thee of."‖—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."§—What more pleaſing!—What more raviſhing and delightful! Again,

2dly. This Law of the Lord is given to be a *lamp* unto our feet, and a *light* unto our path. It is our *pole ſtar* to direct us in our voyage heaven-ward; without which, we ſhould ſail through life's tempeſtuous ſea, in darkneſs and danger; and finally be wrecked on the fatal coaſts of endleſs deſpair.—It alſo ſerves as a *mirror* wherein to view ourſelves, to ſee our ſpots and our blemiſhes; and, at the ſame time, as a *laver* in which we may waſh them away.

* Jer. xxxi. 3. † Iſa. lxii. 5. ‡ Hoſ. ii. 19.
‖ Gen. xxviii. 15. § Matt. xxviii. 20.

In

In it we find the infallible criterion whereby to judge how matters now ſtand between God and us; and what our proſpects are in the world to come.—Would you wiſh to know if you are among the happy heirs of Promiſe; and if your names be written in the Lamb's Book of Life? Search the Scriptures, and there you will find, that "God hath choſen ſuch unto ſalvation, through ſanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth."*—"And that they are Chriſt's friends who do whatſoever he commandeth."†—Beſides,

3dly. The Word of God is an inexhauſtible *magazine*, a moſt plentifully furniſhed ſtorehouſe, from which we may have an ample ſupply for all our wants.—Are we in need of ſpiritual armour, wherewith to combat Satan and all our enemies? Here we have it of every ſort; the Girdle of Truth, the Breaſt-plate of Righteouſneſs, the Shield of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation, with the Sword of the Spirit, With theſe, as Hierom obſerves, St. Paul armed himſelf in all his temptations.‡ And to this wonderful armoury the mighty "Captain of our Salvation" had recourſe, when he foiled and vanquiſhed the Tempter, the great adverſary of

* 2 Theſſ. ii. 13. † Jo. xv. 14. ‡ Hierom in ejus epitaph.

God and Man.*—Do we feel a ſpiritual hungering and thirſting within us? Here is "the true bread that came down from Heaven,"—the "living water,"—"the beſt wine that goeth down ſweetly, cauſing the lips of thoſe that are aſleep to ſpeak:" yea, the celeſtial food that will nouriſh the ſouls of Believers unto life eternal.—Do we perceive any diſeaſe growing upon our ſouls? Or find ourſelves affected with a liſtleſſneſs and deadneſs in duty? Here we find a remedy; "Thy word hath quickened me."—Do we feel the plagues of a hard and impenetrable heart? Here is a preſcription; "Is not my word as a fire? ſaith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?"—Do we find pride and arrogance gaining upon us?—Here is a cure; "God reſiſteth the proud."—Are we in poverty and indigence? Here are divine treaſures to enrich us; the riches of Wiſdom, the riches of Grace, and the riches of Glory.—Are we ready to faint, and ſink under a weight of affliction? Here is a ſoul-reviving cordial, that will animate and refreſh, that will ſweeten the bittereſt cup of adverſity, turn water into wine, and ſorrow into gladneſs. This David found from experience, when he ſaid, "This is my comfort in my af-

* Matt. iv.

flictions:

flictions: for thy word hath quickened me."—Yes, my brethren, the conſolations of God's Word can bear up under every affliction, ſupport under every trial, and even outbrave the King of Terrors, the laſt, and moſt formidable, of the Believer's enemies.

In fine, as ſaith the great and learned Origen, "If thou receiveſt the Word of God with all faith and devotion, it will be unto thee whatever thou deſireſt. If thou art grieved in ſpirit, it will comfort thee, ſaying, *A broken and a contrite heart God will not deſpiſe.*—If thou rejoiceſt, it will augment thy joy, ſaying, *Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice ye righteous.*—If thou art angry, it ſooths thee, ſaying, *Ceaſe from anger, and forſake wrath.*—If thou art in pain, it cures thee, ſaying, *The Lord healeth all thy diſeaſes.*—If thou art in poverty, it raiſeth thee up, ſaying, *The Lord raiſeth up the poor out of the duſt.*—Thus, this divine manna will be to thy taſte whatever thou chooſeſt."*

Hence it is evident, That the Law of the Lord contains in it, every thing that can promote our happineſs, and give us real pleaſure; and that all the duties which Religion inculcates, are inconteſtably for our profit, and productive of the greateſt advantages: of conſequence, we

* Origen Hom. 7 in Exod.

ought, more eſpecially, to delight in them. And what will induce us, thereto, if ſelf-intereſt, the moſt powerful of all motives, will not? Our immortal felicity is at ſtake; and if now we are wiſe, we ſhall be wiſe for ourſelves. So hath God ordered it, That his glory, and man's happineſs cannot be ſeparated. There is not a precept in the laws of Heaven, but what is conducive to our true intereſt; and all the duties therein required bring an ample reward along with them.—Are we called to believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt? This belief is accompanied with ſalvation. "Believe, and thou ſhalt be ſaved."*—Are we commanded to read the ſacred Oracles of divine inſpiration? There we find, not only true wiſdom, ſaving knowledge, and divine inſtruction, but likewiſe the ſweeteſt, the moſt precious promiſes.†—Are we exhorted to pray? This is to aſk that we may obtain: for there is no petition that a ſincere Believer in Chriſt can preſent, but what God will ſign. This his own Son has certified in theſe words, "Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, Whatſoever ye ſhall aſk the Father in my name he will give it you. Aſk, and ye ſhall receive, that your joy may be full."‡—Are we bid to celebrate the praiſes of JEHOVAH? This

* Acts xvi. 31. † 2 Pet. i. 4. ‡ Jo. xvi. 23, 24.

is

is to fill our hearts with gladneſs, and feaſt our ſouls with real pleaſure.—Are we invited to a Sacramental Table? There our ſpiritual man is fed and nouriſhed, our luſts mortified, and our graces ſtrengthened.—In a word; if Religion is ſo beneficial, if there is ſuch pure gold to be dug from this mine, ſurely ſelf-intereſt, was there no other incentive, ſhould cauſe us to delight therein, and to walk in wiſdom's ways, which are ways of pleaſantneſs, and whoſe paths are peace.

Our *Second* conſideration to engage you to ſeek after this holy delight in Religion is, Becauſe it *crowns* and *completes* all our ſervices.

This it doth, *Firſt*, in making them not only acceptable to God, but eaſy and pleaſant to ourſelves. Delight in ſin is worſe than a ſinful action; and delight in duty more excellent than duty itſelf.—David well knew how acceptable to God a cheerful and a voluntary ſervice is; therefore he exhorts his ſon Solomon to ſerve him with a willing mind, as well as with a perfect heart.* More conſiſts in love than in obedience. Hypocrites may obey the divine precepts; but cannot love them: wherefore, all the ſervice which they perform is a toil and a burthen: whereas Saints, who love the Lord, and delight in his

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

Law, find no duty irkſome or inſupportable. This divine love, like wind to the ſails, and oil to the wheels, carries them ſwiftly and eaſily along, in a courſe of duty, without complaining of toils and difficulties by the way. As an affectionate child, who has been long abſent from his father's houſe, rejoices when he draweth near to his home, and approaches to the embraces of an indulgent parent; ſo the Chriſtian, having long walked in the road of duty, is pleaſed, when he conſiders that he is drawing near to the end of his journey: he is delighted with the proſpect of the land that now is not afar off. This delight ſoftens every hardſhip he may yet experience, and ſweetens every bitter cup of which he may have occaſion to taſte, during the remainder of his pilgrimage.—Beſides,

2dly. This delight in Religion, this joy in heavenly things, is a certain proof, a ſure ſign of inward and ſpecial grace. Nothing is a ſtronger evidence of a renewed ſoul, and a more unqueſtionable mark of an heir of Glory. A dutiful ſon rejoices to obey the commands of his earthly parent; and an heir of Glory delights to do the will of his heavenly Father. Grace ennobles him that is born again; it changes his heart and affections; it makes him cheerful in duty, and ready to act in all things willingly and without

without conſtraint; ſaying, with the Royal Pſalmiſt, "O how love I thy law!—How ſweet are thy words unto my taſte!"

Nor is it wonderful that a ſoul, which has once ſeen the beauty of holineſs, and taſted the ſweetneſs of God's word, ſhould delight in it: For the more he receives of it, the more he deſires. Spiritual dainties, while they ſatisfy the ſoul, increaſe the appetite for them. Such as feed thereon find them ſo ſavoury and reliſhing, that they are ready to cry out, "Lord, evermore give us this bread."—Verily, my brethren, there never was a ſoul which really knew what delight in God was, that ever complained of having too much of it; but, on the contrary, always longed for more intimate communion with him, and more perfect enjoyment of him. Again,

3dly. This ſacred joy in God's law makes us reſemble thoſe celeſtial Powers which ſurround the Eternal's Throne, and miniſter day and night in his preſence. With what alacrity, with what pleaſure, with what ſpeed they fly to perform his high commands, and execute his ſovereign will!—How are they raviſhed and tranſported in celebrating his praiſe!—When tranſlated into the heavenly manſions, we ſhall become like unto thoſe glorious Intelligences: But even now, while

while on earth, this ſpiritual delight makes us reſemble them.—But,

4thly. What is of ſtill greater importance,—This delight in the Law of the Lord transforms us into the very image and likeneſs of Chriſt himſelf.—With what pleaſure did he execute his Father's commiſſion! And how greatly did he rejoice to do the will of him that ſent him!—With what cheerfulneſs did he undertake the arduous work of man's redemption! "Lo, I come," ſays he; "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy Law is within my heart."* I, the Meſſiah, the promiſed Deliverer, come.—"I have a baptiſm to be baptized with; and how am I ſtraitened till it be accompliſhed!"† —"With deſire I have deſired to eat this paſſover with you before I ſuffer."‡ Yes, Chriſtians, Chriſt was to be baptized, as it were, with his own blood; and he deſired, he longed for its accompliſhment. And ſhall the Lord of Life and Glory ſo delight in the painful work of our Salvation, and we take no pleaſure in his ſervice?—Did he voluntarily ſuffer, bleed, and die to ſave our lives from deſtruction, and our ſouls from death eternal? And ſhall we refuſe to ſpend thoſe lives in a cheerful obedience to his righteous laws?—Forbid it Heaven! Rather

* Pſal. xl. 7, 8. † Luke xii. 50. ‡ Luke xxii. 15.

let

let every faculty of body and ſoul be conſecrated unto him, and devoted a willing ſacrifice at his pleaſure.

Remember, my brethren, that, without this ſacred delight in God's Law, our reading, hearing, praying, praiſing, and partaking of the moſt ſolemn Ordinances, are in vain, and to no purpoſe. Without this, the performance of religious duties will be "like water ſpilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again;" and ſhall loſe both its honour and reward.—— But animated therewith, the Chriſtian will perſevere in the road of duty, in ſpite of all oppoſition, and advance from one degree of grace unto another, and a higher, until he attains to "the meaſure of the ſtature of the fulneſs of Chriſt."

May the Spirit of God accompany the Word, now ſpoken, with his effectual bleſſing; and powerfully work in us "both to will and to do of his good pleaſure;" for Chriſt's ſake. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON III.

THE BELIEVER STILL WITH GOD.

PSALM CXXXIX. 18.

WHEN I AWAKE, I AM STILL WITH THEE.

HAPPY the ſoul that is in ſuch a ſtate as this! Well might the Pſalmiſt, from his own delightful experience, ſay, "Bleſſed is the man whom thou chooſeſt, and makeſt to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts:" "Bleſſed are they that dwell in thy houſe; they will be ſtill praiſing thee."—— "Their ſoul ſhall be ſatisfied as with marrow and fatneſs, and their mouths ſhall praiſe thee with joyful lips."—But David's enjoyment of God was not confined to the Tabernacle of the Lord; nor to the public worſhip of his ſanctuary: for he had it at all times, and in every place. In God he lay down to ſleep; and when he awaked he was ſtill with him.

In the pious ſon of Jeſſe we have an example of one who could live above the world, and the

the common rate of mankind: but not ſo much by the kingly power and regal dignity he poſſeſſed, as by the ſublimity of his ſoul, and the celeſtial ardour of his affections. The frame of his heart was ſo divinely conſtructed, and the deſire of his ſoul ſo much ſet upon heavenly things, that God pronounced him, "A man after his own heart."*—The Law of his Creator was his ſtudy all the day, and the ſublime ſubject of his meditations in the night watches. Like the Roman Orator, he "was never leſs alone, than when alone!" for he was *ſtill with God.* Not with him by fits and ſtarts; now in heaven, and anon upon earth; but his heart was fixed on him, and the affections of his ſoul were heavenly and divine.

Not but that the king of Iſrael had other important matters to mind, and many other neceſſary duties to perform, which muſt have diverted his attention, at times, from this grand Object; for it is impoſſible, while in this earthly tabernacle, to have the eye of the ſoul always upon God. Such uninterrupted happineſs, is reſerved for the ſaints in light. Nevertheleſs, David might be ſaid to be *ſtill with God,* becauſe the bias of his inclination was heaven-wards, and, like the needle to the pole, his heart al-

* 1 Sam. xiii. 14.

ways

ways pointed to him. He might alſo be ſaid to be *ſtill with God*, becauſe he was more with him than any where elſe. A man may be ſaid to live at home, although, on account of buſineſs, and the various duties of his ſtation, he is often abroad; ſo a good man may be ſaid to be *ſtill with God*, although employed about his ſecular affairs, and engaged in providing for the neceſſities, the comforts and conveniences of himſelf and family.—He was likewiſe *ſtill with God*, in the ſweet communion and intercourſe he had with him; as ſaith the Apoſtle, "Truly our fellowſhip is with the Father, and with his Son Jeſus Chriſt."

But, for the clearer illuſtration of our ſubject, I ſhall endeavour to ſhow you—FIRST, How, or in what ſenſe, a pious ſoul may be ſaid to be *ſtill with God*.—SECONDLY, Mention a few *Cauſes*, or *Reaſons*, why the heart of a Believer *ſtill is*, and *ſtill deſires* to be *with God*.—And THIRDLY, Make ſome Improvement and Application.

And may that kind and beneficent God, who hath promiſed to be *always* with his people, now touch our hearts with ſuch a pleaſing ſenſe of his goodneſs, as will make us deſirous, at all times, in every place, in every ſtate and condition, to be *ſtill* with him.

I. We

I. We are to ſhow you, How, or in what ſenſe, a pious ſoul may be ſaid to be *ſtill with God*.—And,

1ſt. Such a ſoul is *ſtill with God* by means of *faith*, which is called by the Apoſtle, 'A drawing near to God;' whereas unbelief is termed, 'A drawing back from him.'* By the perſpective glaſs of the promiſes, Faith's eye penetrates into Heaven; it enters within the vail, and takes a view of the *once* lowly Jeſus, when clothed in his robes of humanity, but *now* glorioufly exalted "far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but alſo in that which is to come."—Upon this view of the Redeemer, the ſoul is raviſhed with his glory; ſhe is captivated with his beauty; ſhe moſt cordially embraces him; and, giving up all other lovers, takes him for her Head, her Huſband, and her All. "How," ſays St. Auguſtine, "ſhall I reach my hand into Heaven, that I may take hold on Chriſt?" He thus anſwers his own queſtion; "Believe, and you hold him faſt."—It is by *faith* that we are united to him, as living members to a living head; and ingrafted into him, as tender ſcions into a nouriſhing ſtock.—By *faith* we put on the Lord

* Heb. x. 22, 39.

Jeſus

Jeſus Chriſt as a garment: and by the ſame grace we feed upon him to our ſpiritual nouriſhment and growth in holineſs! Indeed the Believer's life is ſolely in Chriſt; and, conſequently, he may be ſaid to live more in him than in himſelf. What Judah ſaid, concerning his father's life being bound up in Benjamin's life, may well be ſaid of the Believer's life, namely, that it is bound up in Chriſt, and "hid with him in God:" of courſe, he is *ſtill*, he is always with him.

2dly. A gracious man is *ſtill with God*, becauſe his thoughts are ever running upon him, and the powers of his mind are always employed in contemplating him in his glory and his graces, ſaying, with the experienced Pſalmiſt, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my ſoul."*—Thoughts are quick paſſengers, and active travellers.——David's thoughts were heavenly, and ſtill travelled towards the heavenly country. His mind was ever engaged in meditating on the beauties of the celeſtial Canaan, and the happineſs of its bliſsful inhabitants. In all his troubles and afflictions God was with him; and in all his meditations he was with God. And, as it was with the Pſalmiſt, ſo it is with every true Chriſtian: He is ſtill with God, ſtill with his Saviour, in muſ-

* Pſal. xciv. 19.

ing on his grace, in beholding his glory, in contemplating his divine perfections.

3dly. The pious Chriſtian is *ſtill with God* by *Love*, by *Deſire* and by *Affection*. Love wonderfully opens and expands the heart: on its wings the ſoul is wafted to the habitation of her beloved Object; where, in contemplating his graces, ſhe is, though perſonally abſent, mentally and truly united with him. This we find exemplified in the love-ſick Spouſe, who, notwithſtanding ſhe could not ſee him whom her ſoul loved, yet ſhe embraced him in the arms of her affections: And, although ſhe could not find him, ſtill ſhe ſought after him, enquiring of thoſe ſhe met, "Saw ye him whom my ſoul loveth?"*—Like St. Auſtin, every real lover of the Lord Jeſus will be ready to ſay, "I ſhould hate my own ſoul, if I were to find it any where but in Chriſt."—— Like the tribe of Manaſſeh, one part of which was on this ſide Jordan, and the other part in the land of Canaan, the Believer will have one part of him on earth, and the other part in heaven; the fleſh here, and the affections above. As St. Paul ſaid of himſelf, "Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell;"† ſo it is hard to ſay, whether a

* Cant. iii. 3. † 2 Cor. xii. 2.

paſſionate

paſſionate lover of Chriſt is in the body, or out of it: For, although his viſible preſence be on earth, his heart is in heaven. That is the Port to which he ſteers, and the Haven in which he ſeeks to anchor: And thither he is carried by the ſails of deſire, and the gales of affection.—Thus it was with the man according to God's own heart. His breathings and pantings after the Lord were ſtrong and ardent. Like the hard-hunted and thirſty hart, which pants after the water brooks, ſo panted his ſoul after God.* —As the parched earth gapes, and, with open mouth, ſeems to call for drink from the clouds, ſo his heart, as if burning within him, and deprived of its vital moiſture, thirſted "for the living God."—David had many inducements to ſet his affections upon the things on earth. He had there his crown and ſceptre; with honours and riches in abundance; but all theſe he valued not, in compariſon with his God. "Whom," ſays he, "have I in heaven but thee? And there is none on earth whom I deſire beſides thee."†—In a ſimilar manner will the ſoul, that hath ſeen the beauties, and taſted of the ſweetneſs which is in Chriſt, pant after him, and thirſt for the refreſhing ſtreams of his grace. The ſincere lover of Chriſt does not only deſire

* Pſal. xlii. 1. † Pſal. lxxiii. 25.

to have communion with him in glory, but alſo a conformity to him in holineſs. He ſeeks not his preſence alone, but likewiſe for a transformation into his divine image. He is ſenſible of his weakneſſes and ſpiritual maladies; and therefore deſires the beams of the Sun of Righteouſneſs, not merely for refreſhing, but alſo for healing. He ſeeks to be in God, in order that he may become more holy, more like unto him, and more fit for the enjoyment of him in the regions of eternal day; where he ſhall have the ineſtimable privilege of converſing face to face, and of knowing even as he is known.—Thus by *love*, by *deſire* and by *affection*, the gracious ſoul is *ſtill with God*.—But,

4thly. A believing Soul is *ſtill with God* in his *Walk* and *Converſation*. "Our converſation is in heaven,"* ſaith the Apoſtle; and there will that of every true Chriſtian be. The courſe of his life will be uniformly in the road of ſanctification; and his face will always be toward that happy country whither he is going: Yea, his whole external deportment will plainly evince that he is travelling to the New Jeruſalem. His language and his manners announce him to be a Denizen of that imperial City. He ſhines in holineſs with a kind of angelick brightneſs, as

* Philip. iii. 20.

did

did the face of Moſes, when he came down from the Mount, where he had been with God: He ſets the Lord always before him: and though he frequently meets with many interruptions, many hard trials, and ſevere aſſaults, in his journey to the heavenly Canaan, yet, like Noah, he ſtill walks with God, and determinately holds on his way. His feet tread on terreſtrial ground, but his heart is in the celeſtial manſions. His clay-built tabernacle keeps to its parent Earth, but his ſoul converſes with the pure, the holy and happy ſpirits that ſurround JEHOVAH's throne, with whom he longs to have more intimate acquaintance and fellowſhip.

Having thus conſidered, In what ſenſe a gracious and believing ſoul is *ſtill with God*,—we ſhall now, as propoſed in the SECOND place,

II. Mention a few *Cauſes*, or *Reaſons*, why the heart of a Believer *ſtill is*, and *ſtill deſires* to be *with God*.—And,

1ſt. This is owing to the attracting and elevating power of the Divine Spirit, which draws up the heart to God, as the Sun does the vapours from the earth. True grace is of an aſpiring nature, and will always be endeavouring to mount upwards: But the ſoul, while in this imperfect ſtate, is ſo clogged and borne

down with corruptions, that it cannot aſcend, without ſuperior aid. Grace would make it go forward: but Corruption pulls it back. The law in the members ſtrives againſt the law in the mind: and as the one is carrying it aloft, the other draws it down. The one incites, encourages, and ſpurs on the Chriſtian, in his way to the land of Immanuel; but the other checks and keeps him in. During this hard ſtruggle between Grace and Corruption, the Spirit comes and interpoſes; and to that grace which had not ſufficient "might he increaſes ſtrength." The ſoul that reſts upon the Lord he raiſes, ſupports, renders victorious; and with the cords of love he draws it to himſelf.

2d. Another reaſon, why the holy ſoul deſires to be *ſtill with God*, ariſes from the nature of that grace, which the Divine Spirit infuſes into the heart of a Believer, which is an active principle, that carries the ſoul to him who is the Fountain of all her felicity. Whilſt poor unenlightened ſinners, like ſwine, wallow in the mire of ſin and vice, whilſt the grovelling wretch, that cannot raiſe his deſires above the earth on which he treads, like the ſerpent, feeds on duſt, the ſaint who has got the vital principle of grace within him, riſes above the world, and ſoars upward, as an eagle, towards heaven.

A view

A view of Chriſt, by the ſtrong eye of faith, will raiſe in the believing ſoul ſuch an ardent deſire after him, as will not ſuffer her to reſt ſatisfied until ſhe is aſſured of his love. And no wonder, for he is the centre where all the affections meet and terminate.

3d. Another reaſon, why the pious ſoul deſires to be *ſtill with God*, is, becauſe ſhe finds in him all that is near and dear unto her. Every relation, every connexion, even the cloſeſt and the ſweeteſt, ſubſiſt between Chriſt and a believing Soul. He is her *Father*, kind and indulgent; and will not a dutiful Child love to be with ſuch a Father?—He is her *Huſband*; and with whom would a virtuous and affectionate Wife chooſe to be, rather than with her loving Huſband?—He is her "Friend, that ſticketh cloſer than a brother;" and do not friends, whoſe hearts and views are one, deſire to be together?—He is the *Hiding-place*, and the *Rock of Safety*; and whither ſhould his timorous doves fly, when purſued by their cruel enemies, but to the cleft of this Rock?—He is the great and only *Phyſician*, who can cure all our ſpiritual maladies, who can bind up the broken heart, and heal the wounded ſpirit; to whom elſe ſhould the ſoul-diſeaſed, the broken in heart, and the wounded in ſpirit, go, but unto him?—He is alſo of inexhauſtible *Treaſure*,

whence all the wants of his poor and needy ones are ſupplied; and therefore, if we find ourſelves among that number, we will moſt certainly run to him: "For where our treaſure is, there will our heart be alſo."

4th. Another Reaſon, why the gracious ſoul deſires to be *ſtill with God*, is the great and peculiar *Excellencies* which ſhe beholds in him, particularly his *fulneſs* and his *ſweetneſs*.—— Wherever there is a fulneſs, or a ſuperabundance of what we moſt want, we naturally apply. The thirſty heart ſeeks for the full fountain, and the hungry ſoul longs to be where there is plenty of bread. But what fulneſs is comparable to Chriſt's fulneſs? "For it pleaſed the Father that in him ſhould *all* fulneſs dwell."* Every thing that the moſt needy ſoul can deſire is found in him!—He is *Gold* to enrich,—*Raiment* to cover,—*Bread* to ſtrengthen, *Wine* to cheer,—*Mercy* to pardon,—and *Goodneſs* to relieve. In a word, He is "All in All," to the ſoul that poſſeſſes him.

And what greatly enhances the value of this fulneſs of the Saviour is the pleaſing *variety* that is in it; and which ſuits it to the taſte of every Believer. What is it, O Chriſtian, that you moſt earneſtly wiſh for? Is it grace to quicken

* Coloſſ. i. 19.

your

your ſoul, "dead in treſpaſſes and ſins," and to gift it with life everlaſting? Chriſt is the Prince of Life; "he quickeneth whom he will," and giveth life to all who come unto him.—Or, do you wiſh for a medicine to cure your ſpiritual diſeaſes, and to bind up the bones which ſin has broken? Chriſt hath the true balm of Gilead, the ſovereign medicine that can heal every diſeaſe, however deſperate.—Do you want cleanſing and purifying? Chriſt offers his own blood, that cleanſeth from all ſin, to waſh away your defilements. He invites you to the "Fountain opened to the houſe of David, and to the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, for ſin and for uncleanneſs," that you may bathe therein and be made clean.—What a noble Fountain is that which flows from the Rock Chriſt!—What were the famed Aönian and Caſtalian fountains, when compared with this!—No wonder, my brethren, that the ſoul, which knows Chriſt's worth and excellencies, deſires to be always with him.

And what makes this *fulneſs*, that is in Chriſt, valuable beyond all compariſon, is its *duration*, or *permanency*.—It continues not with him for a time only, and then is gone; but it *dwells* in him; it abides in him for ever and ever the ſame. Like light from the Sun, it flows to all his

his people, and ſupplies all their wants, without being leſſened, or in the ſmalleſt degree diminiſhed.—Seeing that the Lord Jeſus Chriſt thus poſſeſſes all fulneſs, and that from his inexhauſtible ſtore, he communicates to his ſervants whatever their capacities, however enlarged, are able to receive, can it be thought wonderful, that ſuch, as are ſenſible of their needs, and feel their wants, ſhould wiſh to be *ſtill* with him?—But,

Beſides this ſuperabundant *fulneſs* that is in Chriſt, there is a peculiar *ſweetneſs* in him. He is, as the Spouſe deſcribes him, "moſt ſweet;"* —and of that ſweetneſs he alſo communicates to his people. Sometimes he does it in his Word and Ordinances; as he did to the diſciples in the breaking of bread:—And ſometimes in the communications of his Spirit, which are ſweet and raviſhing beyond all conception. The love-tokens which Chriſt gives to his favourite ones are ſo pleaſing, ſo ſweet, and ſo valuable, that we cannot wonder at their deſiring to be always with him, whoſe preſence makes a heaven upon earth, and gives a foretaſte of that happineſs which awaits the ranſomed of the Lord in his celeſtial kingdom.

* Cant. v. 16.

Such

Such are ſome of the reaſons why the heart of a Believer *ſtill is*, and *ſtill deſires* to be *with God.*

But, perhaps ſome of you may be ready to aſk, How is it poſſible to attain that ſpirituality of devotion, and that exalted frame of ſpirit, which are peculiar to thoſe who are *ſtill with God?* For the information and ſatisfaction of ſuch enquiring Chriſtians, permit me to offer the few following advices.

1ſt. Endeavour to get juſt notions, and to form honourable opinions of God's glorious perfections and excellencies; more eſpecially of his Juſtice, his Holineſs, his Mercy, and his Truth. In him all that is amiable and excellent is united. How ſweet and raviſhing his Love! How comforting and ſatisfying his Preſence! In fine, to be with God is to poſſeſs every delight. And when the ſoul is convinced of this, by her own pleaſing experience, ſhe will always ſeek to be with him.

At the ſame time that you are ſtudying to form a right judgment of God, endeavour to get juſt notions of ſin alſo.—View it in the glaſs of the *divine Law*, and there you will ſee its ugly and deformed nature: You will perceive how hateful, how malignant and horrible it is; yea, how ruinous and deſtructive to the life and happineſs

pineſs of man, both in time and through eternity. If thus, with faith's diſcerning eye, you take a view of ſin, and ſeriouſly contemplate it, you will moſt aſſuredly reſolve, that it ſhall never be your conſtant companion.

2d. If you would get into that happy ſituation, of being *ſtill with God*, you muſt place a ſtrict watch over your heart, and a ſtrong guard over your affections. Nothing is more deceitful than the human heart; nothing more apt to wander from God, and follow after vanity. It is therefore abſolutely neceſſary that a conſtant watch be kept over it: And more eſpecially after ſacred and ſolemn Ordinances; for then the Chriſtian may expect the rougheſt handling from his ſpiritual enemies. After having been in the Mount with God, Satan will aſſault with his ſtrongeſt temptations, will try every mean to make you loſe all the comfort you had in communion with your Lord; and, if poſſible, draw you entirely from him and his ways. Take therefore good heed to yourſelves, after having been at a Sacrament, or a Sermon, leſt the enemy, with his tares, choke the good ſeed ſown in your heart, and render it unfruitful.

3d. In order to be *ſtill with God*, you muſt be careful to keep up the heat and fervour of devotion in all your ſpiritual exerciſes; for if

you

you once begin to be languid in duty, a careleſneſs about it will ſoon follow: And when the ardour and ſpirit of Religion abate, a coolneſs will ſucceed; and an eſtrangement between God and your ſoul will gradually take place.—When this happens, how difficult will it be, if ever it is effected, to raiſe up a heart that has fallen from God, and to bring it back to him again!—Beware, therefore, I beſeech you, of getting into a dull, a lazy, and a lukewarm diſpoſition in the ſervice of your divine Maſter. Let all your acts of devotion be performed with zeal and fervency of ſpirit; never forgetting to bring, frequently and ſeaſonably, freſh fuel to the ſacred fire.—If you wiſh to enjoy perpetual communion with God, you muſt be much engaged in fervent prayer, and regular in your attendance upon the Ordinances of Chriſt's appointment.—If you would grow and thrive, and be fruitful in the Lord's vineyard, you muſt be planted by, and receive nouriſhment from, the waters of the ſanctuary: For, without a continual ſupply thereof, the life, the ſpirit and vigour of Religion will ſoon fall off, decline, and die.

Laſt. In order to keep up the true ſpirit of Religion in your hearts, let me adviſe you to be much in company with the Saints and

Friends

Friends of God.—As "evil communications corrupt good manners," ſo the godly converſation of pious men tends greatly to bring converts unto Chriſt; and alſo to keep them with him, when brought. One ſaint whets and ſharpens another. By converſing together, in the language of Canaan, our hearts are kept warm and zealous; our ſpirits active and fervent in the cauſe of our great Maſter. If we deſire to be reckoned in the number of Chriſt's flock, it behoves us to feed among his ſheep, in the paſtures of his Word and Ordinances; and mutually to protect, to cheriſh, to encourage one another, until we are removed to his upper fold, and placed in thoſe celeſtial fields, where everlaſting ſpring abides; and where rivers of immortal pleaſure perpetually flow.

III. To what has been ſaid, permit me to add, as propoſed in the THIRD place, a few words by way of *Improvement* and *Application*.—And,

1ſt. If it is poſſible for a Saint, while on earth, to be *ſtill with God*, and to taſte, in his embodied ſtate, ſo much of Chriſt's fulneſs and ſweetneſs, let me earneſtly exhort each of you, my dear Auditors, to imitate the example of the pious Pſalmiſt, that you may become ſharers in his joys.—Heaven muſt be begun on earth, if

we

we wiſh to have it for our eternal Inheritance: And the ſoul that would find Chriſt, muſt have his heart and affections where he is. Our ſpirits are of celeſtial origin: They are emanations from the Deity himſelf, ſtamped with his image, and capable of holding communion with him: It would therefore be a ſhameful degrading of of them, to waſte their operations, in grovelling among the mud and ſlime of earth, for the purpoſe of obtaining a few momentary gratifications. It is unſeemly in the Children of God, and the Heirs of Glory, to be anxiouſly concerned about temporal matters; to be eager in purſuing after the fleeting and unſatisfying vanities of this world. They are, doubtleſs, to be humble, meek and lowly in heart; but they are not to be mean, ſordid and baſe: They are to deny themſelves; but not to degrade and undervalue themſelves: They are rather to keep up, as far as poſſible, that dignity of ſoul, and that gentleneſs of manners, which ſhone ſo conſpicuouſly in the great Author and Finiſher of their Faith.

2dly. Let me perſuade you to follow the example of David, in keeping *ſtill with God*, from this conſideration, That a godly life is the moſt noble and honourable, the moſt ſweet and comfortable

fortable, the moſt perfect and ſatisfactory, and alſo the moſt permanent life you can poſſibly live.

It is moſt *noble* and *honourable*, as it leads you to reſemble God himſelf; and is, in its nature, as much ſuperior to a mere worldly and ſenſual life, as the life of reaſon is above the vegetive life. A true Chriſtian, like Caleb, is "a man of another ſpirit."* Grace inſpires him with the moſt exalted ſentiments, with the moſt elevated deſires, the moſt laudable ambition, and the moſt heavenly affections. On the wings of faith and love, his ſoul mounts above this inferior globe; he takes a view of the celeſtial country; and there holds converſe with its happy and glorious inhabitants, God, Angels, and "the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect."—Again,

A life with God is alſo the moſt *ſweet* and *comfortable*, as it enjoys all that can either give, or perpetuate real happineſs.—The ſoul that is in God is all harmony, and pleaſure. He drinks of the mellifluous ſtreams which flow from the Rock of Ages. His very *duties* refreſh him—Prayer inflames him with divine love; holy Meditation raviſhes and delights him; in believing he experiences all joy and peace.—Being with God, he taſtes of his love,

* Numb. xiv. 24.

which

which is the beginning of heaven in the ſoul; the effects of which are ſo beneficial and powerful, that they ſweeten the bittereſt cup of affliction; they make the moſt rugged and thorny paths, in which the Believer is called to walk, during his journey to the abodes of bliſs, ſo ſmooth and eaſy, that he ſcarcely feels therein painfulneſs or trouble. A ſenſe of God's favour can turn a priſon into a palace, a wilderneſs into a paradiſe, torture into pleaſure, mourning into feſtivity, and death into life. The greateſt enemy to the ungodly is a kind friend to the faithful ſervants of Chriſt: for no ſooner does he break down the walls of their clay-built tenement, than the impriſoned ſoul takes her flight into thoſe ſerene and delightful regions, "where the wicked ceaſe to trouble, and the weary be at reſt." But further,

A life with God is not only the moſt ſweet and comfortable, but likewiſe the moſt *perfect* and *ſatisfactory*.—There is no real felicity, nor ſolid ſatisfaction, in earthly enjoyments. The greateſt happineſs they can give us is tranſient and incomplete. "Though all the rivers run into the ſea, yet the ſea is not full:"* And though all the golden ſtreams of worldly pleaſure ſhould run into the heart of one man, in-

* Eccleſ. i. 7.

ſtead of being ſatisfied, he would pronounce all of them "Vanity of vanities."—Nothing can fully ſatisfy an immortal ſoul, but God: for in him alone all her wants are ſupplied, and all her wiſhes gratified. In him is perfect contentment: In him is a hive of ſweetneſs that will never cloy, a mirror of beauty that will never change, a magazine of riches that will never be exhauſted, and a river of pleaſure that will never run dry. Is not this perfectly ſatisfying? Can there be a more deſirable, a more delightful life, than to be *ſtill with God?*

But, as already obſerved, there is another property in a life with God, which gives infinite value to all theſe now mentioned; and that is its *duration* or *permanency*.—Our preſent life is ſhort and uncertain: Whatever comforts we have in it we muſt ſoon leave them. It is not the nature of earthly bliſs to be ſtable and laſting. Riches take to themſelves wings, and fly away: Relations and Friends all ſet off and leave us: Our bodily and mental Powers fail; and in time forſake us: Nay, *we* alſo, in our turn, muſt bid the world, and all that is in it, an eternal adieu.—But the ſoul that is ſtill *with* God, and living *on* God, ſhall never be ſeparated from him; he "ſhall be for ever with the

the Lord:"* he ſhall behold his beauties unvailed; and, in beholding him, be changed into the ſame image "from glory to glory."† What a happy life muſt the life of a Chriſtian be!—Now, "when he awakes, he is *ſtill with God*;" and, when he ſhall fall aſleep in death, he will only ſhut his eyes upon the world, that he may open them on Him whom his ſoul loveth, whoſe beauties and excellencies he ſhall contemplate, with ineffable delight, through eternal ages. But,

3dly. If they are ſo unſpeakably happy who are *ſtill with God*, how miſerable and wretched muſt thoſe be who are *never with God*; who have him not in all their thoughts, and are quite contented to live without him!—May not ſuch be ſaid to be ſtill in their ſins, in the gall of bitterneſs, and the bond of iniquity? Sin may be with a child of God, but he will not be with ſin; for his heart is againſt it. Very different is it with the wicked, who know not God; for they delight in ſin: they roll it as a ſweet morſel under their tongue: they hug it in their boſom: they will not part with it for God, and all the bleſſings that are to be found in him.

Much in the ſame unhappy condition are thoſe poor, pitiable *Worldings*, "who only mind

* 1 Theſſ. iv. 17. † 2 Cor. iii. 18.

earthly things;" whoſe hearts are *ſtill* with the world. Like the oſtrich, which, although ſhe has wings, cannot fly to any great height, by reaſon of the weightineſs of her body, ſuch perſons are ſo clogged, and ſo kept down with the thick clay of this earth, that, although they have immaterial ſouls, they cannot ſoar above the ground on which they tread. Like Siſera, they lie with their hearts, as well as their heads, nailed to the earth. The world's bewitching treaſure ſo ſteals their affections from the things which are above, that they care little, or nothing, about them. And their wealth, which ought to draw them nearer to God, acts like a milſtone to ſink them into the dark abyſs of unutterable woe. Not but that riches are a bleſſing, when uſed with moderation and propriety; yet, ſtill there is great danger attending them. —With ſafety the bee can ſuck a little honey from the flower; but if put into a caſk of it, ſhe dies: ſo a man, with a moderate ſhare of the good things of this world, may go on in ſafety; but, when deeply immerſed therein, his ſpiritual life is extinguiſhed.

But what ſhall I ſay to thoſe who are *ſometimes*, though very ſeldom, *with God?* The fact is too certain, That there are a vaſt number of profeſſing Chriſtians, who move ſo ſlowly in the

the way of Religion, who are ſo inconſtant in their devotions, and ſo rarely engaged in carrying on a correſpondence with heaven, that it is hard to ſay whether they really poſſeſs any ſuch thing as true grace. They ſeem to have loſt their firſt love; and their appetites appear to be cloyed with ſpiritual viands. God and their ſouls ſeem to be got out of acquaintance; and, conſequently, become indifferent about one another. The time was, when they knew God; and found great pleaſure in his communion.—Time was, when they could weep for ſin, and their eyes run down with tears at a heart-ſearching Sermon; but now theſe fountains are dried up.—Time was, when the commiſſion of the ſmalleſt ſin, and the leaſt neglect of duty, would have pricked their conſcience, and filled their hearts with ſorrow; but now a ſenſe of theſe things has little or no effect upon them.—Time was, when they called "the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable;" when they rejoiced at its approach, and gladly welcomed in the day on which the Sun of Righteouſneſs aroſe upon a benighted world; and ſtill ſhines with his brighteſt beams into the hearts of the faithful.—How did the ſoul then long, and pant, and thirſt after God, and the courts of his houſe!—But ah!—how ſadly is the caſe altered!—

What a wearineſs is it now to ſerve the Lord! —Time was, when the word of God was their comfort, and their eyes were continually upon it; when its promiſes were ſweet to the ſoul; and when the heart trembled at its threatenings. But how are they changed! The ſweeteſt, the moſt precious promiſes of the Goſpel affect them not: and at its threatenings they laugh; as "Leviathan, at the ſhaking of a ſpear."—Time was, when they were earneſt and fervent in prayer; when they could ſend up "ſtrong cries and tears unto him that was able to ſave them from death;" but now they are cold, indifferent and lifeleſs. The wings of prayer are clipped, ſo that it aſcends not. They aſk, as if they did not wiſh to receive: and by the coldneſs of their petitions, they, as it were, tell their heavenly Father to deny them.

But wherefore all this, O profeſſing Chriſtian?—Wherein hath God deceived you, that ye have broken off communion with him, and are become ſo careleſs about pleaſing him?—"What iniquity have your fathers found in him, that they are gone far from him?"* Or what complaint have you got againſt him, that you have forſaken him? Think on this, ye cold and luke-warm, and "remember from whence

* Jer. ii. 5.

ye

ye are fallen, and repent, and do the firſt works."* Shake off your ſhameful indolence ; and, henceforth, double your diligence in your Maſter's ſervice.—You may yet be recovered and brought back. Your Lord hath no pleaſure in the death of the wicked : " With him there is mercy ; and with him is plenteous redemption †.—Seek earneſtly after him ; and ceaſe not, until, by the power of his Spirit working in you, and with you, you get into that happy, that elevated, that heavenly frame of mind in which the Royal Pſalmiſt was, when he could ſay unto God, " I am ſtill with thee."

* Rev. ii. 5. † Pſal. cxxx. 7.

SERMON IV.

CHRISTIANS EXHORTED TO AVOID EVEN THE APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

I THESS. V. 22.

ABSTAIN FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL.

THERE are many perſons whoſe hearts would recoil at the very thought of committing any great and enormous crime, who, nevertheleſs, commit what may be called *Smaller ſins*, without much reluctance, or qualm of conſcience. Great offences againſt God and and his Laws they dread; but ſmall ſins they look upon as venial; not conſidering that one ſin leads on to another; that little ſins are productive of greater; and, by degrees, harden the ſinner in his iniquity, till he comes to commit all manner of vice without ſhame or remorſe; yea, with a certain pleaſure and ſatisfaction. Dangerous, indeed, are the firſt beginnings of evil: for the very ſmalleſt ſin contains in it the ſeeds of a thouſand others; which, if cheriſhed, inſtead

ſtead of being deſtroyed, will produce a crop moſt aſtoniſhingly luxuriant. The beſt time to kill ſin is at its firſt appearance; but if ſuffered to go on, and gather ſtrength, there will be great difficulty in ſubduing it. Would men but ſeriouſly conſider the fatal conſequences which often flow from the commiſſion of a ſin, apparently ſmall, they would ſurely be more on their guard; and would earneſtly endeavour to ſuppreſs every deſire towards it. A Chriſtian ſhould not only avoid being guilty of crimes, but he ſhould, as much as poſſible, be free from the ſmalleſt imputation of guilt. For this reaſon the Apoſtle exhorts the Theſſalonians, and, with them, all who profeſs themſelves the followers of the holy Jeſus, to "abſtain from all appearance of evil."

The greateſt evils that can befal mankind are *ſin* and *death*. The one ſeparates us from God, the great and chief Good; the other ſeparates us from our deareſt friends, and bereaves us of our ſweeteſt earthly enjoyments.—But, of theſe two evils, ſin is the greateſt, and the moſt dreadful. This was the opinion of St. Chryſoſtom, who, when he was told what terrible threatenings the Empreſs Eudoxia had denounced againſt him, coolly replied, "There is only one thing in the world that I fear; and that is *to offend God*."

God."—This ſentiment of the venerable father ought certainly to be ours alſo. We cannot poſſibly place ſin in too bad a point of view; nor form ideas of it more horrible than it really deſerves. It is the cauſe of all our preſent miſery; and will, if indulged and continued in, make us truly miſerable through eternity.

In further diſcourſing on this very neceſſary ſubject, I ſhall endeavour,—FIRST, To ſhow, that it is the *Duty*, as well as the *Intereſt* of every Chriſtian, to flee from all iniquity; and to ſhun ſin of every kind, even that which appears to be the ſlighteſt and the ſmalleſt.—SECONDLY, I ſhall give a few ſhort *Advices*, which, if properly attended to, may be the means, under God, of preventing us from falling into great ſins; and of ſhunning, as much as poſſible, the commiſſion of all others.

And may the good Spirit of the Lord accompany the Word with power and energy: May he ſend it home into our hearts ſo effectually, as to cauſe us to hate ſin in every ſhape; to avoid it as our moſt deadly enemy; and to "abſtain from all appearance of evil."

I. I am to ſhow you, That it is the *Duty*, as well as the *Intereſt*, of every Chriſtian to flee from iniquity; and to ſhun ſin of every kind, even

even that which appears the ſlighteſt and the ſmalleſt.

Far from agreeing with the ſentiments which ſome aſcribe to the Stoics, "That all ſins are equal," we maintain, That "ſome ſins in themſelves, by reaſon of ſeveral aggravations, are more heinous in the ſight of God than others." Some ſins are habitual; others rarely committed.—Some are done in the violence and heat of paſſion, without allowing reaſon and reflection time to interpoſe; others more deliberately, when reaſon has greater ſtrength, and paſſion leſs impetuoſity. There are ſins of ignorance and infirmity, of hatred and malice, of omiſſion and commiſſion, ſome of which are undoubtedly more criminal and odious in the eyes of Heaven than others. For example;—thoſe ſins that are committed coolly and deliberately, after having time to reflect, and weigh the reaſons which ought to deter us from them, are certainly greater than thoſe that are committed through the violence of paſſion. So likewiſe, conſtant and habitual ſins are more heinous than ſins committed but once in the whole life. It is alſo indiſputable, that the ſmaller the motives, and the weaker the incitements to ſin, the more guilty and criminal we are in committing it. There are ſome ſins diſtinguiſhed in Scripture

ture by the epithet of *crying ſins*.—Such are the ſins of thoſe who ſhed innocent blood;—who oppreſs the people of God;—who enrich themſelves by rapine and injuſtice;—who fraudulently keep back the wages of the labourer and the hireling.—But whether they are ſmall or great, ſlight or crying ſins, it is moſt aſſuredly our duty and intereſt to avoid them all. For, although they may appear trifling in our eyes, they are not ſo in the eyes of perfect Purity.—That we ought to flee from all iniquity, and ſhun ſin of every kind, will appear evident from the following conſiderations,

1ſt. Becauſe there is no ſin whatever which can properly be called *a ſmall ſin*, ſeeing it is committed againſt an infinitely glorious and divine Being; and is an impious violation of the Laws of a holy and omnipotent God, whoſe creatures we are, and who has an undoubted right to command our obedience.—If any ſin could be denominated *a ſmall ſin*, it muſt be ſuch as we can eaſily reſiſt and vanquiſh: but no ſin, by which we are overcome, can, with propriety, be called *ſmall*. Beſides, were there any offences againſt the Laws of Heaven which could really be counted ſmall, we ſhould, by being guilty of them, do more diſhonour to the Deity, than by offending in great things: and

for

for this reaſon,—becauſe we thereby ſhow how little reſpect we have for God; ſince we prefer a bauble, the gratification of ſome ſordid luſt, the enjoyment of ſome momentary pleaſure, the pitiful indulgence of ſome ſenſual paſſion, to the will of God, to the glory of our Creator, and to the laws of our rightful Sovereign.—How highly was Eſau condemned for ſelling his birth-right for a meſs of pottage! And if he was ſo ſeverely puniſhed for improperly ſatisfying the lawful cravings of nature, what reaſon can we have to think the irregular indulgence of our carnal paſſions a matter of mere indifference, or, at moſt, a trivial offence?

But, even ſuppoſing theſe ſins to be really ſmall, and as trifling as we may imagine them, nevertheleſs, their frequent repetition, and the numberleſs times we fall into them, ought greatly to alarm us. If we are regardleſs of our ſins, becauſe they are ſmall, let us dread them, becauſe they are many. We cannot doubt but that a great number of ſmall ſins will condemn the ſinner at the bar of God's juſtice, as much as one crime of the greateſt magnitude.—Of conſequence, it is our *duty* and *intereſt* to ſhun the ſmalleſt ſins as well as the greateſt; and to "abſtain from all appearance of evil."

2d. Another

2d. Another conſideration why we ſhould guard againſt the commiſſion of ſin, even the ſmalleſt, is,—becauſe thoſe ſins, which become cuſtomary and habitual to us, and in the practice of which we go on from day to day, render us more criminal in the eyes of a holy God, than thoſe which we may look upon as greater; and into which we may perhaps not fall more than once in our whole life-time; and then only through the ſudden impulſe of ſome ſtrong and violent paſſion. This will appear evident, if we allow, That to commit ſin, knowing it to be ſuch, and conſcious that we are thereby deliberately offending God, will render us more culpable, and more inexcuſable, than to ſin in the heat of paſſion, when we are not in a condition to reflect on what we are doing, or on what we ought to do.—This Obſervation naturally leads to another, namely,

3d. That they who, without much ſcruple, or remorſe, commit ſmall ſins, will ſoon and eaſily come to commit great ones.—No man becomes altogether wicked and abandoned at once.—There are, as it were, certain rudiments of vice, certain degrees of iniquity, which men go through, before they are perfectly knowing, and thoroughly confirmed in wickedneſs. The path of ſin is ſmooth and eaſy; and he who

takes one ſtep therein, will find no great difficulty to take another. By a more intimate acquaintance with vice, its uglineſs and deformity diſappear; and ſins which, at firſt ſight, appeared enormous and deteſtable, by being often ſeen, diminiſh in magnitude, and loſe their hideous aſpect. It is aſtoniſhing what cuſtom and habit will do! The hardened ſinner, without much pain or trouble to his conſcience, will commit crimes, the very mention of which would have made him ſhudder, when he was a novice in wickedneſs. Of this we have a famous inſtance in Hazael, king of Syria. When told, by the prophet Eliſha, what horrible cruelties he would act upon the children of Iſrael, how that he would burn their ſtrong holds, ſlay their young men with the ſword, daſh their children, and rip up their women with child, his heart revolted at the very idea; he ſpake of it with abhorrence, ſaying: "Is thy ſervant a dog, that he ſhould do this great thing?"*—Nevertheleſs, we know that he did it afterwards. A little vanity, a little jealouſy, a little ambition, a little avarice, a little malice, may deſtroy the greateſt men, and ruin their immortal ſouls. For, if theſe baleful paſſions are not ſtifled in their birth, they will, in a very

* 2 Kings viii. 12, 13.

ſhort

ſhort time, gather ſtrength, and bear down all the remainder of virtue before them. Acts frequently repeated beget a habit; and a confirmed habit is a ſecond nature; ſo that when men have got into a cuſtom of ſinning, it becomes, in a great meaſure, natural to them. Hence they become hardened in iniquity: from hardneſs they fall into impenitence; and from impenitence into eternal deſtruction.—Such the deceitfulneſs of ſin; and ſuch are the dreadful conſequences of iniquity!—O, my brethren, let us ever be on our guard againſt it; let us flee at its firſt approaches; and avoid it as the moſt deadly of all our enemies.—Again,

4th. Another Conſideration why we ſhould ſhun every ſin, and "abſtain from all appearance of evil," is,—becauſe the very ſmalleſt ſins give place to the Devil, and open for him an entrance into our hearts. Give him but the ſmalleſt acceſs, and he will ſoon make room enough. There needs but a ſmall chink in a ſhip, to let in the water, that will ſink her to the bottom of the ocean: there needs but a ſmall breach in the walls of a beſieged city, to let in the enemy, and render them maſters of the place: ſo, likewiſe, there needs but a ſmall opening to let Satan into the ſoul; and, having got but the leaſt influence over it, he will not fail to bring

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it, in a very little time, entirely under his dominion.—He is neither careleſs nor tardy in his operations: He watches every opportunity; and neglects no means by which he can accompliſh his infernal purpoſes. It is eaſier to keep an enemy out of our houſe, when the door is ſhut, and we upon our watch, than to turn him out, after he has ſurprized us and got in: and it is much eaſier to keep Satan out of our hearts, than to expel him, after he has taken poſſeſſion. Small diviſions, ſmall neglects, and animoſities ſeemingly trifling, have undone nations, and ruined the moſt flouriſhing ſtates: and ſmall ſins, overlooked and uncontrouled, have been the ruin of many precious ſouls. How neceſſary then to ſet a watch before our mouth, to keep the door of our lips, and to guard our hearts, which are deceitful, and naturally prone to that which is evil!

5th. Another Conſideration which ſhould make us careful to avoid the commiſſion of every ſin, even the ſmalleſt, is, That we find Almighty God puniſhing ſins, apparently ſmall, with the ſevereſt judgments.—Lot's wife but turned her head about to take a parting look of Sodom, and ſhe was immediately puniſhed, by being turned into a pillar of ſalt, there to ſtand, a monument of divine diſpleaſure.—Moſes, the meek,

meek, the great Legiſlator of Iſrael, and moſt highly favoured Prophet of the Lord, was excluded from entering into the promiſed Land, for ſtriking the rock twice, when he ſhould have done it but once.—The man who gathered a few ſticks on the Sabbath-day, was, by the order of Heaven, ſtoned to death.—Uzzah, for putting forth his hand to ſtay the ark, when it ſhook and tottered on the cart, was inſtantly ſtruck dead.—Saul loſt his kingdom, for offering a ſacrifice to God, without having firſt made ſupplication to the Lord; though he was then in a great ſtrait, thinking that Samuel would not come, hearing the people murmur, ſeeing his army decreaſe by deſertion, and afraid to engage his enemies. And the ſame Prince was entirely rejected of God, for not having fully executed his orders againſt Amalek, which were utterly to deſtroy man and beaſt; but he, contrary to the divine command, ſaved ſome of the beſt of the oxen, and of the ſheep "to ſacrifice unto the Lord."—Such examples ſufficiently prove, that no offence againſt God's law ought to be deemed trivial;—that the ſmalleſt ſins are worthy of death;—and, conſequently, that it is our duty and intereſt to abſtain from all ſins, even the ſmalleſt.

But, if it behoves us to guard ſo attentively

againſt the ſmalleſt ſins, and to "abſtain from all appearance of evil," how much more ſedulous ſhould we be in watching over ourſelves, leſt we fall into great ſins, and commit crimes againſt which the ſevereſt puniſhment is denounced, even vengeance and death eternal!—Nothing is ſo ugly, ſo deformed, and ſo deteſtable in its nature as ſin: and nothing is ſo dreadful in its effects. Sin is the ſource of all our miſery, and the cauſe of all our misfortunes. What was it that brought a curſe upon the whole earth, and turned our firſt parents out of Eden's bliſsful bowers? Sin.—What was it that deſtroyed the image of God in us,—that disfigured the beauty, the glory, and the comelineſs which ſhone forth in man, when he came from the forming hand of his Maker, and transformed him, with all his offspring, into lions, into tygers, wolves, dogs, and ſwine? Sin.—Whence come all thoſe troubles, thoſe pains and diſeaſes of body, and that death which conſigns the clay-built tabernacle, once a fair and goodly fabrick, to the dark and inglorious cells of corruption? From ſin.—Whence alſo that gloom, that fear, that dread and horror which break our mental peace, and occaſion ſuch gnawings and remorſe of conſcience? From the ſame ſource.—Nay, more;—What

was

was it that armed the juſtice of God againſt his own Son; that cauſed the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, "the brightneſs of his Father's glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon," to take upon him the human form,—to become "a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief,"—to ſuffer the moſt cruel and ignominious treatment,—to be ſcourged and crowned with thorns,—to be buffeted and ſpit upon,—to be faſtened to a croſs,—to drink vinegar and gall,—to have his hands and feet perforated with nails,—and his ſide pierced with a ſpear,—yea, to die, and be laid in the dark and ſilent manſion of the dead? It was ſin, that abominable thing which the Almighty hateth; and which could not be expiated but by the blood of the heavenly and ſpotleſs Lamb of God.—Strange, my brethren, that after all this, after all the injuries that ſin has done us, after all the miſery and wretchedneſs that it has brought on us, and on our glorious Redeemer, we ſhould ſtill love it, ſtill careſs, and cheriſh it!—And ſtill more wonderful, if poſſible, that we ſhould continue to indulge ourſelves therein, when we know that, by ſo doing, we bring inevitable deſtruction, endleſs torment, and unutterable woe upon our own ſouls! Wonderful indeed!—Convinced of our folly and our danger, let each of us now re-

ſolve, in the ſtrength of the Lord, to give up all ſin, and fully determine, that as we have done iniquity in time paſt, we will do ſo no more.

Having thus endeavoured to ſhow you, That it is the *duty*, as well as the *intereſt* of every Chriſtian to flee from all iniquity, to ſhun ſin of every kind, even the ſlighteſt and ſmalleſt, yea, to abſtain from even the appearance of evil;—I ſhall now proceed to the next general head of our Diſcourſe, namely,

II. To give a few ſhort Advices, which, if properly attended to, may be the means, under God, of preventing you from falling into great ſins, and of ſhunning, as much as poſſible, the commiſſion of others.—And,

1ſt. Let me exhort you to avoid every thing, and every occaſion, that may throw you into the way of temptation, and induce you to commit iniquity.—When a man knows that his enemy is in the ſtreet, waiting to find him, and that a dangerous rencounter will enſue, if they meet, ſurely it would be moſt prudent and ſafe for that man not to go out of his houſe. So alſo, when we know that the company and converſation of certain perſons will corrupt our morals, or raiſe in our minds ideas inimical to virtue,

tue, we certainly ought not to hold any communication with them.—If we are perſuaded that we cannot go to ſuch a place, nor enter into ſuch an houſe, without being expoſed to temptations to ſin, then we ſurely ought not to go to ſuch places; for it is much eaſier to keep out of the way of temptations than to reſiſt them.—If we know that the reading of certain books will vitiate our minds, inflame our ſenſual paſſions, or hurt our hearts, we ought, not only to avoid looking into ſuch books, but we ſhould alſo hold them in deteſtation and abhorrence.—In like manner are we to act with every thing that may have a tendency to endanger our virtue; even with thoſe things which are in themſelves innocent, if we apprehend that they afford any temptation to violate the Laws of God, and the Precepts of the Goſpel.

2d. Another method for ſhunning the commiſſion of ſin, is, to ſuppreſs evil thoughts as ſoon as they ariſe.—The moſt ſucceſsful way to do this, is to avoid every thing that may raiſe them. When a man perceives that certain thoughts, though in themſelves perfectly innocent, have been followed by ſuch as are bad, he ought immediately to divert his mind from them, and to turn it to ſome proper object. In theſe caſes the reading of God's holy

Word, and the ſinging of Pſalms, are highly beneficial; ſo likewiſe are the company and converſation of cheerful and religious people.—If men would but take theſe precautions, and make uſe of theſe means, they would, moſt aſſuredly, avoid many of thoſe ſins into which they fall.—Again,

3d. In order to avoid ſin, and to ſubdue it in our mortal bodies, we muſt be careful to watch over our ſenſual paſſions; and to reſiſt the firſt motions of the fleſh to tranſgreſs.—It is neceſſary to extinguiſh the firſt ſparks of this ſtrange fire, which, if neglected, may raiſe a moſt dreadful conflagration. The ſhield of faith is given us to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one; let us uſe it ſkilfully at his firſt onſet.—We have alſo the ſword of the ſpirit to cut down our ſinful luſts; let us wield it valiantly, and ſpare none of them, however greatly beloved. Every plant, which our heavenly Father hath not planted, let us pull up before it ſtrike its roots deep, and gather too much ſtrength for us to eradicate. Vice muſt be nipped in the bud, and ſin deſtroyed in the birth, if we would live to God, and to holineſs. If we begin by times, and make it a ſettled point to deny our luſts that gratification which they demand, we ſhall find much eaſe and comfort in the practice.—It is

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by no means ſo difficult a taſk to conquer them, as to content them: for, give them what you will, they will always aſk for more. An ambitious man will much ſooner, and with leſs trouble, conquer his ambition than gratify it: and an avaricious perſon will more eaſily bring his mind to contentment, than ſatisfy that baſe that ſordid paſſion.

4th. As we are daily ſinning againſt God, "through the ignorance that is in us," and from a want of proper reflection on what we do, we ought to embrace every opportunity, and uſe every mean, by which we may be inſtructed in the knowledge of God and ourſelves; and by which we may be excited to the faithful diſcharge of our duty.—And if our conſcience ſhould at any time be in ſuſpenſe, let us refrain from every thought, word, and action, which appear to be doubtful; more eſpecially from what we are convinced is ſinful. For if ſins of ignorance require mercy to pardon them, we may well be alarmed at the thoughts of God's judgments when we ſin againſt light and knowledge.

Laſt. Let me exhort you to keep up a conſtant intercourſe with Heaven by *meditation* and *prayer*. Reflect often on the horrible nature of ſin, and on the irreparable miſchief it has done, in both the natural and the moral worlds. Conſider

ſider it as that vile ſtain which has darkened and diſfigured the image of God in man;—as the inſupportable burthen under which all nature groans;—as the murderer of the human race; as the cruel executioner that crucified the Lord of Glory, and nailed the Prince of Life to the accurſed tree;—and as that which ſtill arms divine Vengeance againſt us.

Meditate alſo on the awful judgments which God hath poured out on the workers of iniquity, ever ſince that unhappy time when ſin firſt invaded the earth, and perverted the parents of our race.—Think on the watery judgments by which the old world was deſtroyed:—on the fiery judgments by which the cities of the plain were reduced to aſhes:—on the various and dreadful judgments, by which Jeruſalem, and her wretched inhabitants, were ſo awfully and remarkably puniſhed:—And, above all, meditate on the laſt Judgment, when the Almighty ſhall pour out the full vials of his wrath, and the fierceneſs of his anger upon guilty and impenitent ſinners: then will you be perſuaded that ſin is the moſt tremendous of all evils; and that even the ſmalleſt ought to be ſhunned and deteſted.

Be likewiſe earneſt with God in beſeeching him to cleanſe you from ſecret faults; to keep you

you back from preſumptuous ſins; and to prevent them from having dominion over you.—When Satan, the World, or the Fleſh, tempts you to ſin, reſiſt them ſtedfaſtly in the Lord; looking up to Omnipotence for might to withſtand: for in God only is the ſtrength of every ſaint. Through him we can do all things; but without him, we ſhould ſoon fall an eaſy prey to our remorſeleſs enemies. Pray for the Spirit of Grace to work in you a work of faith with power; to create in you a clean heart, and renew a right ſpirit within you; to take away the hard and ſtony heart out of your fleſh, and to give you an heart of fleſh;—to cauſe you to die daily to ſin, and live to righteouſneſs. "Likewiſe reckon ye alſo yourſelves to be dead indeed unto ſin, but alive unto God, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Let not ſin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye ſhould obey it in the luſts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as inſtruments of unrighteouſneſs unto ſin; but yield yourſelves unto God, as thoſe that are alive from the dead; and your members as inſtruments of righteouſneſs unto God:" So that, after having kept the faith, and walked with God on earth, you may live and reign with him in heavenly glory, through everlaſting ages, by Chriſt Jeſus: "To whom be glory and dominion, for ever and ever. Amen."

SERMON V

SERMON V.

THE GREAT IMPORTANCE AND NECESSITY OF GOOD WORKS.

TITUS III. 8.

THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING, AND THESE THINGS I WILL THAT THOU AFFIRM CONSTANTLY, THAT THEY WHICH HAVE BELIEVED IN GOD MIGHT BE CAREFUL TO MAINTAIN GOOD WORKS.

IN every age of the Chriſtian Church men have entertained different ſentiments reſpecting *faith* and *good works*. Some have even gone ſo far, as to exalt the value and power of faith to the prejudice of morality, to the neglect of a holy life, and a godly converſation. Nor was the number of ſuch ever greater than it now is; if we may form our opinion from the preaching and practice of many around us.—That all, who do ſo, are actuated by ſiniſter motives, I will not venture to affirm; but we may ſafely ſay, They act improperly and indiſcreetly. Surely they are but ill acquainted with the real principles of our holy Religion, who think that a ſimple belief, and a bare profeſſion

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of Chriſtianity, diſcharge men from their obligation to moral duties. The great deſign of the Goſpel of Chriſt is to reform the lives and manners of men; and to promote the love and practice of virtue.—Faith and holineſs are abſolutely neceſſary to ſalvation. And as morality, or good works, does by no means render faith of none effect, ſo neither does faith excuſe any man for his immorality, and his neglect of good works.

The Apoſtle having, in the preceding verſes, opened the doctrine of *Juſtification by Faith*, through the free grace and mercy of God in Chriſt Jeſus, independent of the good works performed by Believers, immediately, to prevent his meaning from being miſunderſtood, gives Titus a moſt ſtrict and ſolemn charge to urge and preſs home, upon all thoſe who believe the Goſpel, the great neceſſity of *good works*: thereby intimating, That ſuch, as are juſtified by *faith*, inſtead of thinking that they are exempted from all obligations to perform works of righteouſneſs, ought, for that very reaſon, to be the moſt careful and attentive to maintain them; ſeeing that, by their profeſſion of the Chriſtian faith, they are moſt ſolemnly bound to their performance.—And, although good works cannot bring us into a juſtified ſtate, yet they are abſolutely requiſite to our continuance

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in it. Though they are not the price by which the kingdom of heaven is purchaſed, they are, nevertheleſs, the way which leads to its poſſeſſion; and in which it behoves us to perſevere unto the end, if we would be ſaved. It is not enough for Believers in Chriſt to *do* good works, but they muſt *maintain* them, and excel in them. For let them think their faith to be ever ſo bright and genuine, if it is not productive of the Chriſtian virtues, it is a mere fancy, and a dangerous deluſion.

"This is a faithful ſaying," ſays the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles, it is the word of Truth, and not to be deſpiſed; it is worthy of all acceptation, and deſerves to be regarded as a matter of the utmoſt conſequence; to be treaſured up in our memories, and kept ready for all occaſions.—"Theſe things I will that thou affirm conſtantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." It will not be ſufficient for thee to declare this doctrine to thy hearers now and then; and, for once or twice, to urge them to put it in practice; but thou muſt do it *conſtantly* and uniformly, at all times, and upon every occaſion. Would to God that the Miniſters of the Goſpel paid more attention to this advice of our Apoſtle!—It is what they ought ſeriouſly

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to conſider, and earneſtly to enforce upon their people; that thereby they may convince them how abſurd and dangerous it is to expect the mercy and favour of God, without making conſcience of their duty.—They ſhould endeavour to perſuade their hearers, that a bare, inactive faith will not ſave them:—that a true and ſaving faith is lively and operative;—that it bringeth forth fruit unto holineſs;—that it overcometh the world, purifieth the heart, and transforms the whole man into the image and likeneſs of Chriſt.

In the further proſecution of this intereſting ſubject, I ſhall endeavour, FIRST, To point out the great *importance* and *neceſſity of good works*—SECONDLY, In order to prevent ſelf-deception, by thinking thoſe *good works*, which are not ſo in reality, I ſhall mention ſuch *conditions*, ſuch *marks* and *characters* of good works, as will enable you to judge with ſafety and certainty concerning them.—And, LASTLY, Conclude with ſome *Improvement* of the ſubject.

And may the Spirit of Wiſdom and Truth ſo open the eyes of our minds, and ſo ſtrengthen our mental powers, that we may not only know our duty, but alſo perform it, to the glory of God, and the ſalvation of our precious ſouls.

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I. We are to point out the great *importance* and *neceſſity of good works*. And,

1ſt. This is evident from the cloſe and inſeparable *connection* there is between *faith* and *good works*.——We are told, that "without faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God;"* and alſo, "that faith without works is dead:"† conſequently, we can neither be acceptable to God, nor poſſeſſed of a true and ſaving faith, whilſt we are deſtitute of good works. True faith not only embraces the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, as a *Prieſt*, who hath expiated our guilt, who hath atoned for our tranſgreſſions, and purchaſed eternal ſalvation for us;—or as a *Prophet*, who hath taught us the will of God, and inſtructed us in the myſteries of the kingdom of Heaven;—but it alſo joyfully receives him as our ſovereign Lord and *King*: it cheerfully ſubmits to his government, his laws and ordinances; and ſtudies to pleaſe, to obey him in all things.—But how is it poſſible to ſerve and pleaſe God, if we do not the things which he has commanded us? How can Chriſt be ſaid to reign *in* us, and *over* us, if we trample upon his authority, contemn his precepts, and refuſe to do his work?—How can we perſuade ourſelves that the Holy Spirit dwelleth in us, to animate, to guide and con-

* Heb. xi. 6. † James ii. 20.

duct us to the bliſsful regions of everlaſting felicity, if we bring not forth the fruits of righteouſneſs?—Is it not the ſure mark of thoſe who are in Chriſt Jeſus, that they "walk not after the fleſh, but after the ſpirit?" If ſo, then let no man believe that he has any thing like a true and ſaving faith within him, whilſt he maintains not good works, which are the beſt and moſt infallible evidences thereof: for the ſun will as ſoon be without light, and the fire without heat, as a true faith be without the works of righteouſneſs.

2dly. The neceſſity of good works will appear evident, if we conſider the nature of the *Covenant of Grace*, into which God has been pleaſed to enter with his people, in the perſon of our glorious Mediator.—In that Covenant JEHOVAH graciouſly promiſes to be *our* God; and wills that we ſhould be *his* people *.—He kindly engages to act the part of a tender-hearted and affectionate *Father* towards us; but it is indiſpenſably neceſſary that we live as his *Children*. Chriſt hath undertaken to complete our happineſs; and, in order thereto, he requires that we ſhould become *new men*; that we ſhould not henceforth live unto ourſelves, but unto him who died for us; who roſe again, and left us

* 2 Cor. vi. 16, 18.

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an example that we ſhould follow his ſteps.—How then is it poſſible for a Believer to think of neglecting the practice of good works; ſeeing that he is bound to perform them, by virtue of this Covenant into which God has entered with him? The condition of the Covenant of Works was, "Do this, and live;"* conſequently, under it a man could only be juſtified by his works: whereas the condition of the Covenant of Grace is, "Believe in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and thou ſhalt be ſaved;"† which plainly teaches us, That we are juſtified by *faith*, without the works of the Law.—Nevertheleſs, this divine Covenant does, by no means, promiſe us life and ſalvation, if we do not the works of righteouſneſs. Although Chriſtians are not under the Law, but under the Goſpel, yet they are bound to obſerve its moral precepts, as the rule of their conduct. Yea, the Goſpel itſelf is "the Law of the Spirit of life, which makes us free from the law of ſin," and ſubjecteth us to the law of righteouſneſs: It is a law that enjoins us to break off all connection with ſin and Satan; and which binds us to do "whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report:"

* Luke x. 28. † Acts xvi. 31.

report :"* A law which commands us to "live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world ;"† to the end that we may live for ever bleſſed and happy in the world to come.

3dly. The neceſſity of good works is manifeſt from this conſideration,—That there is nothing which God has more expreſsly commanded ; nothing to which he hath annexed more glorious rewards ; and on the neglect of which he has threatened ſeverer judgments. "Ye ſhall be holy ;" ſaith the Moſt High ; "for I, the Lord your God, am holy."‡—The divine Author and Finiſher of our faith has alſo declared the neceſſity of good works in theſe words, "Not every one that ſaith unto me, Lord, Lord, ſhall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven."§—So likewiſe has St. Paul, in his firſt Epiſtle to Timothy ; wherein he entreats him to "charge them that are rich in this world,—that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to diſtribute, willing to communicate ; laying up in ſtore for themſelves a good foundation againſt the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."‖—And in his Epiſtle to the Hebrews, he thus exhorts

* Philip. iv. 8. † Tit. ii. 12. ‡ Levit. xix. 2.
§ Matt. vii. 21. ‖ Chap. vi. 17, &c.

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them, "To do good, and to communicate forget not: for with ſuch ſacrifices God is well pleaſed *." Chriſt will have none of his diſciples barren, or unfruitful in the works of righteouſneſs: "for every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and caſt into the fire."

And is it not according to our works that we ſhall be judged, and have the final and deciſive ſentence paſſed upon us at the laſt and general aſſize? "Come, ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" What are the reaſons which our Lord aſſigns for this gracious and diſtinguiſhing ſentence? They are the following: "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirſty, and ye gave me drink; I was a ſtranger and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was ſick, and ye viſited me: I was in priſon, and ye came unto me."—Not that the Righteous had done thoſe acts of kindneſs to Chriſt himſelf, but to his friends; nevertheleſs, he values it equally the ſame, as if he had received their kindneſs in his own perſon. This he declares in theſe words: "Inaſmuch as ye have done it unto one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

* Chap. xiii. 16.

On the other hand, we find the dreadful ſentence of condemnation denounced againſt the wicked and the ungodly, for the neglect of theſe pious and charitable deeds. "Depart," ſaith the Judge of all fleſh, "Depart from me, ye curſed, into everlaſting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirſty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a ſtranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: ſick, and in priſon, and ye viſited me not.—And theſe ſhall go away into everlaſting puniſhment: but the Righteous into life eternal."*

The glory, which the Righteous ſhall enjoy in a future ſtate, is repreſented under the metaphors of an *harveſt*, a *reward*, a *victory*, a *crown* and *kingdom*: and *ſowing*, *working*, *fighting*, *running a race*, are mentioned as the means for obtaining it. As we cannot reap before we have ſown, nor be rewarded without having done our work; as we cannot conquer without engaging in the combat, nor be crowned before we have finiſhed our courſe, ſo, no heaven, no glory, no bliſsful eternity, is to be expected without the works of righteouſneſs. How evident then muſt the neceſſity of good works appear to all!

* Matt. xxv. 34, &c.

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4thly. Another conſideration, which not only ſhows the neceſſity, and utility of good works, but which ſhould powerfully excite us to put them in practice, is,—That there is nothing more *worthy* and *becoming* in human nature; nothing more proper for advancing the glory of God, the intereſt of Chriſt's kingdom, and the happineſs of mankind.—What more becoming in a rational and intelligent creature, to whom God has given, not only a ſoul capable of knowing, and a heart of loving him, but likewiſe hands to perform his work, and feet to walk in his ways? what more worthy of a Chriſtian, whom God has endowed with wiſdom and underſtanding? what more worthy of a Believer, whom Chriſt hath redeemed with his own blood, than a ſincere deſire to pleaſe his Creator, and imitate his Redeemer, the Pattern of all perfection?—And although we cannot profit the Almighty by our goodneſs, nor hurt him by our ſin; though our righteouſneſs reaches not to him, yet we thereby glorify him, in ſhowing a reſpect and reverence for his divine Majeſty, a humble ſubmiſſion to his will, a ſacred awe of his power, and a holy fear of offending him: and thus, by our example, we induce others to imitate us, ſo far as we are imitators of Chriſt. This our Lord expreſsly enjoins in theſe words, "Let your

light ſo ſhine before men that they may ſee your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*—Chriſt rejoices to find his followers fruitful in righteouſneſs: and the Holy Spirit, who is grieved at the ſins of men, is pleaſed to behold their good works; and confers the higheſt degrees of his grace on thoſe who therein do moſt abound. The bleſſed Angels, who rejoice at the converſion of a ſinner, are alſo delighted in beholding our works of faith, and labours of love. They encamp around the ſaints, and with cheerfulneſs execute the orders of the Moſt High concerning them.—Surely theſe ought to prove weighty arguments, and powerful motives, to perſuade us to practiſe and maintain good works.

But, beſides what has already been obſerved, our good works are highly beneficial in advancing the happineſs of our brethren.—"Theſe things," ſaith the Apoſtle, "are good and profitable unto men." We thereby *edify* and inſtruct them; and, at the ſame time, we prove the *truth* of our holy Religion, and make our calling and election ſure.—The Saints around us are offended at our iniquitous practices; but they are edified by our good works; and they love, they eſteem thoſe who perform them.

* Matt. v. 16.

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There is ſuch beauty, and ſuch amiableneſs in Virtue, as muſt gain her the eſteem and reverence of all, even the moſt profligate: For whatever their words and actions may be, I will venture to aſſert, That there is no man who would not, in his heart, wiſh himſelf able, at a dying hour, to ſay, In all things, I have acted becoming [the Chriſtian character, and done my duty to my God, to my neighbour, and to myſelf.

By a holy and godly life we not only edify and ſtrengthen our brethren, but we alſo prove the *truth* of that Religion which we profeſs. As nothing brings ſo much ſcandal and diſhonour upon Religion as the wicked and immoral lives of its profeſſors, becauſe the impious and profane mockers of things ſacred take occaſion from thence to ridicule and inſult it, ſo nothing does Religion more credit, nor better proves its divine origin, than the pious and upright lives of thoſe, who openly tell the world, that they are not "aſhamed of the Goſpel of Chriſt." Hence it has been obſerved, That the moral and godly lives of the primitive Chriſtians, brought over more converts to Chriſtianity than all their writings did.

While thus we adorn our Chriſtian Profeſſion, we likewiſe encourage our own hearts,

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and confirm them in the certainty of our *calling* and *election*.—To know if we are among the happy number of God's choſen and elected ones, it is not neceſſary that we ſhould aſcend into heaven, and there turn over the leaves of the book of Life, to find if our names are written therein. We need only to examine our lives and actions. Good works are the fruits of the Spirit of God; which Holy Spirit is given to none but the children of God; and all the children of God are called and choſen. A tree is known by its fruit; and our calling and election are known by our works.

Laſtly. Another conſideration which ought powerfully to incite us to the practice of good works, is—That they draw down the favour of God upon us; they beget peace in our ſouls, aſſuring us that thoſe who are holy here, ſhall be happy hereafter.—When we ſay, that good works draw down the favours and bleſſings of God upon us, we mean *ſpiritual* bleſſings in particular. But it is eaſy to prove that God often heaps temporal bleſſings on his faithful ſervants, as is evident from his dealing with the Patriarchs, and many of the Old Teſtament Saints.—Verily, there is not a ſoul that fears God, and keepeth his commandments, but may hope and truſt in his mercy.—Though none of

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our actions, even the very beſt, deſerves the epithet of *good*, yet a gracious God, for Chriſt's ſake, rewardeth them as ſuch; mercifully overlooking our failings and infirmities.—The Lord comforteth his people in their ſorrows, and ſupports them in their weakneſs. He fortifies them againſt the attacks of their enemies: ſtrengthens them for the combat, and makes them more than conquerors over their moſt formidable foes. He increaſes their faith, animates their hopes, makes them joyful in adverſity, and finally cauſeth all things to work together for their good. They enjoy a peace of mind, and a ſerenity of ſoul, which nothing can deſtroy; and to which the wicked are utter ſtrangers. Whilſt the ſinner's conſcience is agitated like the troubled ſea, the righteous enjoy a ſweet, a calm repoſe. Nothing diſturbs him.—And why? Becauſe he is at peace with God, and alſo with himſelf. But that which terminates all his troubles, and crowns his felicity, is an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom of his Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt, where all his ſincere, though feeble efforts to love him, to ſerve him, and to advance his glory on earth, ſhall meet with an infinitely glorious and permanent reward.

From what has been ſaid, we may certainly be

be convinced of the abſolute *neceſſity of good works*, and fully perſuaded that it is our indiſpenſable duty to *maintain* them; not for a ſeaſon only, but through the whole of our earthly exiſtence.—A Believer's life ſhould be a continual ſpring and autumn. It ſhould reſemble the tree of life, in the paradiſe of God, which bears fruit through the twelve months of the year.

But as we are apt to impoſe upon ourſelves, and ready to take that for a *good work*, which is not ſo in reality, in order to prevent this ſelf-deception, I ſhall now, as propoſed, under our *next* general head of diſcourſe,

II. Mention ſuch *Conditions*, ſuch *Marks* and *Characters* of *good works*, as will enable you to judge with ſafety and certainty concerning them. And,

1ſt. Let me obſerve, That no work can be called *Good*, unleſs it be ſuch as God has expreſsly commanded us to perform: for whatever God has not commanded, and which is not perfectly conformable to the rule that he has given in his Word, cannot be really good, however plauſible it may otherwiſe appear. We have but one ſovereign Lord and King, one ſupreme Legiſlator and Judge, whom we are bound to

ſerve;

ſerve; and whoſe laws are given to be the rule of our conduct: therefore, it is only when we act in obedience and conformity to them that we are doing good. This is evident from theſe words, ſpoken by the Prophet Jeremiah; "For the children of Judah have done evil in my ſight, ſaith the Lord; they have ſet their abominations in the houſe that is called by my name, to pollute it. And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the ſon of Hinnom, to burn their ſons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart."* Here God repreſents to the Jews the enormity of their crimes, and the horrible light in which he beheld their devotions, by ſimply telling them, *That they did things which he commanded them not; and which were the fartheſt from his intention.* Hence it follows, That we are not to form the rule of our life and manners from common opinion, from the precepts of the wiſeſt of of mortal men, nor from the wiſdom of human reaſon, which is weak, and in many caſes erroneous; but from the law of God alone; which is the only ſure, infallible, and perfect rule for ſquaring our lives and actions; and by which our conſcience is to be bound and directed.

* Jer. vii. 30. 31.

2dly.

2dly. Another thing requiſite to conſtitute a *good work* is, That it be done in *faith*, or with a firm perſuaſion that it will be acceptable and well pleaſing in the ſight of God. Without faith none of our performances can meet with the approbation of the Almighty; as St. Paul expreſsly declares in theſe words: "Whatſoever is not of faith is ſin."*—Though a man ſhould do the beſt action in the world, yet, if he believes it contrary to the will of God, he therein tranſgreſſes. It is faith that gives value to our works; for, without it, they have none. Indeed, ſtrictly ſpeaking, our very beſt actions have no merit in them, to entitle us to the favour of God and life eternal; ſeeing that, in them, we fall infinitely ſhort of that perfection which the Law requires. Our reward then is not of merit, but of the grace and mercy of God in Chriſt Jeſus, by, and through, whoſe merits and righteouſneſs alone, we are pardoned, juſtified, and ſaved.—Again,

3dly. Another ingredient, which is abſolutely neceſſary in the compoſition of a *good work*, is *ſincerity of heart*.—There are ſome who do what God hath commanded, and what they know to be agreeable to him, and yet their works are not really good; becauſe ſuch perſons act not

* Rom. xiv. 23.

from

from a principle of love to God, and with a view to honour and pleaſe him, but from *ſelf-love*, and with a deſign to pleaſe themſelves, or others. "My ſon," ſaith God, "give me thine heart:*——Indeed, my brethren, *ſincerity of heart* is all the perfection to which we can attain in this life: and therefore, when that is wanting, our ſervices muſt verily be imperfect. But, when the heart is ſincere with God, he is graciouſly pleaſed to accept and eſteem our works; not according to the greatneſs, or exactneſs of the performance, but according to the *ſincerity* of the heart and intentions. This is evident from the caſe of Aſa, who, although he failed in his reformation, and the high places were not taken away, nevertheleſs his heart was *perfect* with the Lord his God, all his days.†

Here it may not be improper to remark, That although a want of intention to pleaſe God will render an action *bad*, which otherwiſe would have been *good*; yet an intention to pleaſe him will not make an action *good* that is in itſelf *bad*. —This remark is exceedingly neceſſary; becauſe there are many who flatter and deceive themſelves in this matter, notwithſtanding the Scripture has taken particular care to guard us againſt it. The Apoſtle Paul, before his converſion to

* Prov. xxiii. 26. † 2 Chron. xv. 17.

Chriſtianity,

Chriſtianity, had good intentions when he perſecuted the Church of Chriſt; yea, he thought that he did God good ſervice; nevertheleſs, when better inſtructed, he never attempted to juſtify his perſecutions by his intentions; but confeſſed his ſin, and glorified the grace and mercy of God in forgiving him.*—The Prophet whom God ſent from Judah to Jeroboam, at Bethel, and whom the Lord commanded neither to eat nor drink, in the place whither he ſent him, in allowing himſelf to be perſuaded by another prophet, who told him that an angel of the Lord had bidden him bring him home to his houſe, that he might eat bread and drink water, had no intention to diſobey God; nevertheleſs, he was ſeverely puniſhed for acting contrary to the divine command: for when he was gone from the houſe of the old prophet, who brought him back, a lion met him in the way, and ſlew him.†

4thly. Another condition required to conſtitute a *good work* is,—That it be done ſolely with a view to the *glory* of God, and not from any ſelfiſh motive, ſuch as a deſire to reap profit, or to gain the favour and applauſe of men. For example; the giving of alms is a duty which God has commanded: but if we perform this with a deſign to paſs for humane and charitable

* 1 Tim. i. 13, 14. † 1 Kings xiii. 24.

among

among our neighbours, the action, though good in itſelf, can by no means be called *a good work*, in the ſight of heaven.—It is therefore neceſſary to have the Apoſtle's advice conſtantly in our eye; and to take heed, "That whether we eat or drink, or whatſoever we do, we may do all to the glory of God,"* to the edification of the Church of Chriſt, to the benefit of our brethren, and to the honour of our Chriſtian vocation.

Laſtly. That our works may be entitled to the epithet of *good*, they muſt have an equal regard to all God's commandments.—The duties enjoined in the one table of the Law are not to be performed, and thoſe in the other neglected. —God has ſo united them that they cannot be ſeparated; and he who does violence to one of the divine commandments, does it to them all. Of thus ſeparating the tables of the Law, and making a diſtinction between *moral* and *religious* duties, God complains moſt grievouſly, by his ſervant, the prophet Iſaiah, in theſe words; "To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me? ſaith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beaſts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye

* 1 Cor. x. 31.

come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incenſe is an abomination unto me; the new moons, and ſabbaths, the calling of aſſemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the ſolemn meeting. Your new moons, and your appointed feaſts, my ſoul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye ſpread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear."*—But why this ſore and dreadful threatening againſt his ancient people of Iſrael?—They ſeemed to be zealous in his ſervice, regular in their devotions, and deſirous to advance the honour of his Name. So they verily appeared: but a ſacrifice ſtill more grateful was wanting. What this was we learn from the following verſes; "Waſh you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; ceaſe to do evil; learn to do well; ſeek judgment; relieve the oppreſſed; judge the fatherleſs; plead for the widow."†—Here it is evident, That the duties of the firſt table of the Law, unaccompanied with thoſe of the ſecond, inſtead of being acceptable to God, drew down his ſevereſt judgments. Love to God and our neighbour is the

* Iſa. i. 11, &c. † Ver. 16, 17.

ſum

ſum and ſubſtance of the whole Law: and theſe are ſo cloſely connected, that it is impoſſible to ſeparate them. "If any man ſay, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar." However religious he may appear towards God, if he is deſtitute of love, charity, and juſtice towards man, his religion is vain; and there is neither truth nor reality in his profeſſion.—— Having ſaid ſo much on theſe two general heads of our diſcourſe, we ſhall now conclude with ſome IMPROVEMENT and APPLICATION.

From the *conditions* required to conſtitute *a good work*, and by theſe *marks* and *characters* of it, let every man examine and judge the actions of his life. When he is about to enter on any buſineſs, let him conſult with his heart and conſcience, in order to aſcertain if that which he is going upon be conſonant to the will of God, and tends to advance his glory; if he himſelf acts from a right principle, and with a view of promoting the beſt ends and purpoſes.—To examine the actions of the day ſhould be the work of the evening; that we thereby may find out what ſin we have committed, and what duty we have neglected; in order, that we may beſeech God to pardon the one, and give us grace to diſcharge the other more faithfully in time to

come.—We ought to conſider that the eye of the Almighty is ever upon us; that he is the witneſs of all our actions, and will one day be our impartial and inflexible Judge. And, as we know not but that death may arreſt us in every action we perform, let us undertake nothing, in the performance of which we would dread to be found, when ſummoned to the bar of Divine Juſtice.

Thus, although our beſt works are imperfect, yea, ſullied with much pollution, and ſtained with many ſinful ſpots, nevertheleſs, if they proceed from a true faith in Chriſt Jeſus, from a love to God, from a ſincere deſire to promote his glory, and from charity unfeigned, we have every reaſon to hope that our gracious Lord, for the ſake of our great High Prieſt, will accept of them; eſpecially, as they proceed from the operation of his own Spirit; and as the merciful Redeemer covers their defects, and their blemiſhes, with his own moſt perfect righteouſneſs.

Seeing that we are thus expreſsly commanded by God "to maintain good works," and as they only are the friends of Chriſt who "do whatſoever he hath commanded," let none of us, my brethren, be ſlothful in this moſt important buſineſs, "but fervent in ſpirit, ſerving the Lord."

Lord."—We are all ſtewards in God's houſe-hold; we have each our taſk aſſigned us; with a promiſe of reward, or puniſhment, on our well, or ill, executing it. Life is the time given us to perform our ſervice, and to inſure the great reward promiſed to God's faithful ſervants.—But if we ſuffer that to paſs away in ſloth and indolence, or ſpend it in the ſervice of ſin and Satan, what can we expect, but "a fearful looking for of judgment," and of that dreadful puniſhment which God has threatened to inflict on the wicked and unprofitable ſervant?

Remember, Chriſtians, we can carry nothing out of this world, but our *works*. Our pleaſures, our riches, our honours, all forſake, all leave us at death, and the mouth of the grave! Nothing, but the *good*, or *evil*, we have done, accompanies us into the other country; the one to reward, and the other to puniſh us.—"Joy unſpeakable and full of glory," or miſery and pain, without end or alleviation, muſt be the conſequences of our acting. Whilſt the day remains, let us be up and doing, with all our might, whatever our hand findeth to do; leſt, before our work is finiſhed, the night overtake us, wherein no man can work. As the tree falleth, ſo it muſt lie; and as death leaves us, ſo judgment will find us; for in the ſilent man-

ſions of the dead there is no faith nor hope; no work nor device; no wiſdom nor knowledge.

And, as we are ſinful, weak and imperfect creatures, who can neither think a good thought, nor do a good action, without the aid of Divine Grace, let us earneſtly beſeech the Father of Mercies to ſend his bleſſed Spirit into our hearts, to cleanſe and to renew them, to ſanctify us wholly in ſoul, and in body; that we may be able to think, to ſay, and do thoſe things that will be acceptable and well-pleaſing in his ſight. ——Let it be our higheſt ambition to ſerve our God; and our greateſt dread to offend him. —Let this reflection be ever preſent with us, "Thou God ſeeſt me;" thou knoweſt my moſt ſecret thoughts, and art acquainted with all my ways.—This will have a tendency to make us more on our guard againſt ſin; and more fearful to tranſgreſs the commands of our Lord; and it will, at the ſame time, excite us more powerfully to advance the glory of our Creator, to edify our brethren, and to make our own calling and election ſure. In whatever work we engage, we ſhould conſider it as poſſibly the laſt of our life; and ſo perform it, as if we were to be immediately called to give an account of what we have done, "whether it be good or bad."

In

In fine, let this conſideration, That "after all we have done," or can do, "we are but unprofitable ſervants," keep us ever humble and lowly in our own eyes.—Little cauſe have the beſt Chriſtians to boaſt of their good works, and their ſpiritual attainments. Inability, to do what is really good, is manifeſt in even the regenerate themſelves: and ſin, in this imperfect ſtate, cleaveth faſt to the holieſt of us all. How apt are the moſt advanced in the ways of God to ſtumble in walking, to murmur and complain of hardſhips and difficulties in their courſe!—How ready are we to faint and weary in well-doing!—And how eaſily are we led "into captivity to the law of ſin which is in our members;" ſo that we cannot do the things which we would!——Were men but duly to conſider this, they would ſee the neceſſity of going to Chriſt; that, through him, they may obtain favour with God, and the acceptance of their ſervices: For where is the perſon, whoſe experience does not conſtrain him to cry out, with the Apoſtle, "I know that in me dwelleth no good thing?"*—Until we are in Chriſt, and, by faith, take him along with us, our beſt ſacrifices are an abomination in the eyes of perfect Purity. Without Chriſt we have no golden

* Rom. vii. 18.

cenſer to perfume them, nor any altar to ſanctify them: We have nothing but our own wicked hearts to conſecrate them upon; which makes them *our* offerings, not the offerings of the *Lord*.—When the prodigal ſon came to himſelf, and conſidered that he had nothing, and could do nothing;—that he was ſtarving on huſks, in filth;—and muſt needs periſh, if there he remained; this conſideration made him reſolve to return to his father's houſe.—Much did the Apoſtle of the Gentiles value himſelf on his zeal for the religion of his anceſtors, on his morality, and his unblemiſhed reputation, before he knew Chriſt. But, when that bleſſed knowledge was given him, he then counted all but perſecution and blaſphemy, loſs and dung. Then did he put an infinite value upon the knowledge of Chriſt; and was willing to reſign all, to part with all, that he might be found in him; being fully perſuaded, that, after this happy union, he could ſay, "I have all, and abound:" "I can do all things through Chriſt, who ſtrengtheneth me."*—"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf, unleſs it abide in the vine," and continue united with the root, ſo neither can we bring forth the fruits of righteouſneſs, nor do any thing that is truly good, while out of

* Philip iv. 13.

Chriſt,

Chriſt, and ſeparate from him. He who is the *Author* muſt alſo be the *Finiſher* of our Faith. He muſt not only begin, but likewiſe finiſh the good work in us. His arm muſt heal, ſupport, and ſtrengthen us, elſe we ſhall fall and faint by the way: And in him we muſt walk, if we would happily reach the end of our journey. It is the work of God's Spirit to call, and not only to call, but to perfect; and not only to perfect, but to ſtabliſh, ſtrengthen, and ſettle us. Let us therefore beg of him to do the work in us, and to take all the glory and the praiſe unto himſelf.—"May the very God of peace ſanctify you wholly: and may your whole ſpirit, and ſoul, and body, be preſerved blameleſs unto the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt." Amen.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

SELF-EXAMINATION THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY.

I CORINTHIANS XI. 28.

BUT LET A MAN EXAMINE HIMSELF; AND SO LET HIM EAT OF THAT BREAD, AND DRINK OF THAT CUP.

NOTHING is more neceſſary, nor more profitable to man, than *ſelf-examination.* —The human heart is a great deep, not eaſily to be fathomed: its dark corners cannot be ſearched, but with the utmoſt difficulty; nor can the corruptions, which lie there concealed, be explored, without the greateſt labour and pain. But, although ſelf-examination, be a moſt arduous and difficult work, it is not only the *duty* of every man, but alſo his real *intereſt*, to ſet about it ſpeedily and earneſtly; if he wiſhes to reap thoſe advantages which are thereby to be acquired.—It is proper, it is requiſite at all times; but more eſpecially when we have a near proſpect of ſitting down at the Lord's Table, and of commemorating the matchleſs love of a dying

dying Saviour, over the ſymbols of his broken body and ſhed blood. This the Apoſtle expreſsly enjoins all intending Communicants, in the words of our text; "But let a man examine himſelf; and ſo let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

Here a forcible command is given, though it is modeſtly expreſſed. We are not left to our own choice whether we ſhall examine and eat, or whether we ſhall let it alone; for the injunction is peremptory. It is the ſame as if he had ſaid, You *muſt* examine yourſelves; and, on finding that you are in any meaſure prepared, you *muſt* "eat of that bread, and drink of that cup:" or be it otherwiſe at you peril.

But, notwithſtanding this poſitive precept, there are ſome perſons who will neither examine nor eat:—And there are others who examine, and will not eat.—The latter are thoſe timorous and fearful ſouls, who think that matters are in ſo unfavourable a ſtate with them, that they ought not to venture to the feaſt.—On the contrary, there are ſome who eat, but will not examine; in doing of which, they act the part of audacious and preſumptuous ſinners.—There are likewiſe ſome who, in obedience to the command given in the text, both examine and eat. —God grant that all of us, who have thedeſire

and

and the expectation of eating and drinking in the King's preſence, next Lord's-Day*, may, by his Holy Spirit, be excited and enabled ſo to examine ourſelves, as that we may then be found prepared to eat of that ſacred bread, and drink of that divine cup, to the killing of our ſins, to the ſtrengthening of our graces, and to the feeding of our ſouls for life-everlaſting.

In the further proſecution of this ſubject, I ſhall—FIRST, Conſider what this *Examination* is.—SECONDLY, The *Subject* of this examination.—THIRDLY, The *Rules* by which we are to examine.—FOURTHLY, The *Neceſſity* of this examination.—And, LASTLY, Conclude with ſome *Improvement* and *Application*.

I. We are to conſider what this *Examination* is; namely, of a man's ſelf.—This *ſelf-examination* is a reflex act of the mind; or a turning of the eyes of the ſoul inwardly upon ourſelves.—This is one of the moſt difficult taſks in the world, which requires great ſtrength of reaſon, great ſagacity of mind, and a deep penetration of judgment to execute it aright. It is a ranſacking of the conſcience, and a taking of the ſpiritual man to pieces. It is a ſerious and impartial review of our paſt conduct, and alſo of

* Preached before the adminiſtration of the Lord's Supper.

the

the preſent ſtate of our hearts. To this we are called, when the Scripture exhorts us to "conſider our ways."*

In *ſelf-examination* a man muſt ſearch into the moſt ſecret corners, and the moſt hidden receſſes of his own heart; where, upon a diligent and impartial ſcrutiny, he will find many things which ought not to be there; many abominations which lay unobſerved, and many ſhameful vices, of which he had little or no idea.—There a *thief* may lie concealed;—there a *hypocrite* may be found lurking;—and there a *debauchee* may be indulging himſelf unperceived. It therefore behoves a man to ſearch as ſtrictly into himſelf, as the Jews were wont to ſearch their houſes for the forbidden leaven, and to curſe that which they could not find out. A worthy Communicant muſt try, and alſo approve himſelf. He muſt conſider the end and deſign of this ſacred Ordinance of the Lord's Supper; together with its nature and uſe: likewiſe his own views in attending upon it; and his frame of ſpirit for receiving it. It is the *children*'s bread, and muſt not be given to *dogs*. This table was ſpread for friends only; for ſuch as have ſpiritual appetites, and live ſpiritual lives. Conſequently, if a perſon would ſit down

* Hag. i. 5.

thereat

thereat with comfort, he muſt prepare and purify himſelf by faith. He muſt labour to ſubdue all his ſinful and irregular paſſions, to mortify his corrupt luſts and affections, to cleanſe himſelf from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, that he may be qualified, in ſome degree, to hold communion and fellowſhip with his Lord.

II. Our next, and SECOND general head of Diſcourſe was—To conſider the *Subject* of this examination. "Let a man examine *himſelf*," ſays the Apoſtle. He is to be both the *Judge* and the *Criminal*, the *Examiner* and the *Witneſs*. He ſits down upon a Bench, under the authority of the King of kings, and cites himſelf before himſelf, there to be acquitted or condemned.

All mankind may be divided into two claſſes; viz. *ſaints* and *ſinners*: conſequently, they are either in a ſtate of *grace*, or in a ſtate of *nature*: they either belong to the family of God, or the family of the Devil; are heirs of Glory, or devoted victims to eternal Miſery. Now, it is ſurely the buſineſs of every man to examine how things ſtand with him; that he may know whether he is in a *natural* or a *regenerated* ſtate; whether he is a child of God, or a ſervant of Satan; and how it would moſt likely fare with him,

him, were his everlaſting and unchangeable condition to be now fixed. This ſelf-examination is of the utmoſt importance to us all, and is expreſsly commanded in divers places of Scripture, in various, though ſimilar terms, ſuch as theſe, "Try yourſelves; prove your own ſelves;—examine yourſelves," and the like.—But on what is a man to examine himſelf?—

1ſt. He is to examine himſelf in reſpect to the *ſins* he has committed, and the *duties* he has omitted and neglected.—He is to ſummon himſelf before the tribunal of Conſcience, and enquire into his inward and outward conduct. He muſt try to recollect wherein he hath offended God, through ſins of ignorance and infirmity; and wherein he has failed in duty.—He muſt alſo call to mind his wilful and preſumptuous tranſgreſſions, with their heinous aggravations, in being committed againſt light and reaſon, love and mercy; yea, againſt ſolemn vows and voluntary engagements to ſerve the Lord.—To the great ſcandal of Religion, and the heaping of wrath upon their own heads, there are ſome perſons who will, one day, confeſs Chriſt for their Lord and Maſter, will promiſe him dutiful allegiance, with ſincere fidelity, and, the next, throw out oaths and imprecations, curſing and ſwearing, from the ſame mouth.—Too often does

does it happen that the hands which, one day, handle "the word of life," the ſacred ſymbols of Chriſt's broken body and ſhed blood, are on the next, employed in acts of violence, miſchief, or deceit.—The feet that carried them to the houſe of God, and the Table of the Lord, to-day, may, to-morrow, be obſerved carrying them to the haunts of ſin, the temples of Satan, and the ſtews of uncleanneſs.—And the eyes that, yeſterday, looked on a crucified Saviour, may, to-day, be ſeen caſting their meretricious glances on a lewd and painted Jezebel.—Ah! my brethren, ſhould theſe things be?——No, ſurely.—And yet they are but too common among many who bear the Chriſtian name!—Have none of you been guilty of theſe crimes? And are you perfectly clean from theſe tranſgreſſions?—Conſider attentively.—If you are, give God the praiſe.—If you are not, make haſte to waſh away your defilements with the tears of repentance; and your crimſon-coloured ſins with the blood of the Lamb of God, which only can cleanſe from all ſin, leſt incenſed Juſtice execute upon you that vengeance which is due to your crimes. But,

2dly. As a man is to examine himſelf reſpecting the ſins he hath committed, and the duties

hath omitted, ſo it is neceſſary that he ſearch into his *graces* and his *virtues*.—You are to try what is your knowledge, and what your experience, both as to the fundamental principles, and the practical parts of Religion. For ſuch as are ignorant of thoſe things, particularly as they relate to their loſt ſtate by *nature*, and their recovery by *grace*, are not fit to take a place at the Lord's Table; becauſe they are incapable of "diſcerning the Lord's body."—You muſt alſo examine into your *faith*, how it ſtands; whether weak or ſtrong, clear or cloudy. This grace is of the utmoſt importance to Believers. It is the *eye* of the ſoul that beholds Chriſt's lovelineſs; the *feet* that run to him; the *arms* that embrace him, and the *mouth* that taſtes his ſweetneſs.—Now, it behoves you to conſider if you have ſeen his beauty, and pronounced him "the Chiefeſt among ten thouſand, and altogether lovely;" if you have fled to him for refuge, and laid hold on him, as your Saviour and your God; if you have taſted of his ſweetneſs, been enraptured with the enjoyment of him, and declared him vaſtly ſuperior to all worldly delights. You muſt likewiſe endeavour to find out if your faith be of that genuine kind which purifieth the heart, which worketh by love, which

which overcometh the world, and produces the bleſſed fruits of righteouſneſs.

Next, you are to examine into your *love* towards your God and Saviour, whether it be ardent and ſtrong, or cold and indifferent. Try if your love to Chriſt ſurpaſſes all other loves; if he is fairer in your eyes than the children of men, and precious above all things; if his graces, his glories, and his excellencies have ſo captivated your heart, that, were the whole world, with all its riches, its honours and pleaſures, ſet in competition with him, you would give up all, you would renounce all, as mean and unworthy of your regard. If you find it thus with you, if you are ſenſible that the fire of this love is always alive and burning, though not equally ardent and bright, then it is well. Cheriſh it carefully, and ſupply it ſeaſonably, leſt it ſhould fade and die away, and you, in conſequence, loſe your comfort, and your peace.

Having ſettled this point, next examine into your *repentance* and *obedience*. Conſider if your grief and ſorrow for your offences have been real and ſincere;—if you have mourned more for the want of Chriſt, than for the want of the world; more for the evil of ſin, than for the troubles and afflictions of life;—and if this repentance has raiſed in your ſoul an utter abhor-

rence to all iniquity, and, at the ſame time, an earneſt longing after holineſs.—Upon this examination, do you find the ſervice of God pleaſant and delightful?—Is prayer, hearing of ſermons, and going to a ſacramental Table, nay, even *ſelf-examination*, the hardeſt of all theſe duties, become ſweet and deſirable?—Are you thirſting after higher degrees of perfection, after more intimate and permanent communion with him who is your Lord and Maſter?—If this is your caſe, if you find, upon trial, that your *faith* is true and genuine; your *love* to God active and vigorous; your *repentance* real; and your *obedience* ſincere, this knowledge of your ſtate will give you the greateſt comfort and ſatisfaction: And you will cheerfully confeſs, That all the toil, that all the pains you have undergone, in this work of ſelf-examination, have been amply compenſated.—But we ſhall now proceed to our THIRD general head of Diſcourſe, namely,

III. To conſider the *Rules* by which we are to examine ourſelves.——Theſe are the Law and the Teſtimony; the Goſpel and our own Conſcience.

1ſt. We are to examine ourſelves by the pure and holy *Law* of God.—This is the only ſtraight and

and unerring *rule* by which we are to ſquare all our actions, and regulate our thoughts and words. "The Law of the Lord is perfect converting the ſoul;" and bleſſed are they that walk therein. This ſtraight and perfect rule we are by no means to bend to our crooked ways; but to make our ways conformable to it. Infinite Wiſdom framed this rule; Mercy and Love gave it to mankind, for directing them in the affairs of life, for advancing their happineſs on earth, and fitting them for eternal glory in heaven. Nothing is contained in God's righteous Law but what is for our intereſt in time, and through eternity.——How profitable then would it be for us, in imitation of the pious Pſalmiſt, to make it our "meditation all the day."*—But,

2dly. Beſides the *Moral* and ancient Law, given under the Moſaick Diſpenſation, we are, in ſelf-examination, to uſe that new and more perfect Law of liberty, denominated *The Goſpel*, by which life and immortality are brought to light; and in which every thing is clear and explicit that relates to our duty to God, to ourſelves and others. This "Word of God is quick and powerful, and ſharper than any two-edged ſword, piercing even to the dividing aſunder of

* Pſal. cxix. 97.

ſoul and ſpirit, of the joints and marrow, and is a diſcerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."*—This "will bring to light the hidden things of darkneſs; and will manifeſt the counſels of the heart."†—This is the Law by which we ſhall be judged in the great and awful day of the Lord, when our unalterable doom ſhall be fixed; and according to this the ſovereign Judge of all fleſh will act, in paſſing the deciſive ſentence. In all our tranſactions this Law muſt be the ſole arbiter and director. No decrees of Councils, no deciſions of Aſſemblies, no laws of the Land, no cuſtoms of the Place, no dictates of our own fancy, are to ſuperſede the authority of this *divine Law*, which is pure, perfect, and the eternal ſtandard by which we are to try our ways, and judge of our actions. It will therefore be, moſt certainly, our intereſt to examine ourſelves by it *now*, that we may not be condemned by it *hereafter*.

3dly. Another *rule*, whereby we are to examine ourſelves, is *Conſcience*.—This is the teſtimony and ſecret judgment of the ſoul, which approves or diſapproves, applauds or reproaches a man, according as it believes his actions to be good or bad. It is God's vicegerent in the human breaſt; and, unleſs greatly violated and cor-

* Heb. iv. 12. † 1 Cor. iv. 5.

rupted,

rupted, will ſeldom, or never, give an erroneous deciſion.—There are certain *marks* and *characters* which are common to all God's people, by which a man may decide concerning his ſpiritual ſtate. All Believers have not *every* mark of grace; but there are certain ones, which *all* will have, who are really regenerated and born again. For example;—they will "delight in the Law of God after the inward man:" they will have a very high eſteem for Chriſt, with a moſt ardent deſire to poſſeſs him: they will have a ſincere love for all men, eſpecially for thoſe that are of the houſhold of faith: they will have a real hatred to ſin, and an utter averſion to all iniquity: they will earneſtly ſeek to be made conformable to their divine Head; and will ſtrive to imitate him in all his imitable perfections: they will grow in grace, and advance in holineſs, until they "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the meaſure of the ſtature of the fulneſs of Chriſt."—Having theſe *marks* and *characters*, our Conſcience will approve; and the Spirit of Truth will bear witneſs, with our ſpirits, that we are the children of God.

Having ſaid ſo much on the *rule* by which

we are to examine ourſelves, I ſhall next, as propoſed in the FOURTH place,

IV. Conſider the *Neceſſity* of this ſelf-examination, eſpecially before partaking of the Lord's Supper.—"Let a man examine himſelf; and ſo let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."—We find, from the divine Records, that, in every age of the Church, preparation was always reckoned neceſſary, and ſolemly made, before any publick and ſacred ſolemnity. ——With what care and attention did Jacob, before he went to Bethel, to ſacrifice unto the Lord, enjoin all his houſhold to put away their ſtrange gods, to waſh and purify themſelves, and to change their garments.*—When God was about to give the Law from Mount Sinai, he commanded the children of Iſrael to prepare and ſanctify themſelves for three days previous to that awful ceremony.† And, under the Levitical Economy, there was not the ſmalleſt veſſel, or utenſil, uſed in the ſervice of the ſanctuary, which was not firſt prepared, by conſecration, for a ſacred purpoſe.—Yea, under the Goſpel Diſpenſation, we find our bleſſed Saviour himſelf, who is our Pattern and Ex-

* Gen. xxxv. 2. † Exod. xix. 10.

ample,

ample, as well as the Author and Finiſher of our faith, waſhing the feet of his diſciples, before he adminiſtered this holy Ordinance unto them.*—And ſhall we refuſe to examine, to waſh and purify our ſouls before we appear in the Banqueting-houſe of the King of kings, in whoſe ſight the heavens themſelves are not clean?——Shall our Lord and Maſter order an upper room to be ſwept and garniſhed for celebrating a communion feaſt; and we, his ſervants, neglect to ſweep our hearts, to cleanſe our ſpirits, to put off our vile garments of ſin and ſhame, that we may appear acceptably in his preſence?—But,

1ſt. This *ſelf-examination is neceſſary* for getting a proper *knowledge* of ourſelves, and of God's dealing with our ſouls.——However paradoxical it may appear, it is too certain a fact, That many men are utter ſtrangers to themſelves; and know much more of the world than they do of their own hearts.—But let a perſon's attainments be ever ſo great, let his knowledge in hiſtory, in arts and ſciences, be ever ſo extenſive, if he is unacquainted with himſelf, all is but a ſplendid ignorance, and a ſpecious folly. A man muſt be wiſe to himſelf, before he can

* Jo. xiii. 5.

juſtly

juſtly merit the eſteem of others: And this true wiſdom cannot be acquired without ſelf-examination. Though ſhamefully careleſs and indifferent about knowing how matters ſtand betwixt God and us, it ſurely is the intereſt of every man to have this knowledge. Without it we are unable to judge whether we are in a ſtate of *nature*, or in a ſtate of *grace*; whether we are in the road to heaven, or to hell; whether we ſhall ſtand juſtified or condemned, at the great tribunal of the ſupreme Judge of all mankind.—Theſe, my brethren, are concerns of the utmoſt importance, in which we are all intereſted, and which cannot be decided without ſelf-examination.

2dly. The *neceſſity* of a man's examining himſelf is evident, from its being one principal *mean* for bringing about his *reformation*.—Should a pious change appear in the life and converſation of a ſinner, without this ſelf-examination, it would be but a doubtful converſion, and little to be depended upon. That is certainly the ſureſt reformation, and that the moſt laſting change, which follows a mature, calm and deliberate enquiry into ourſelves, and a ſtrict examination of our ways. This the Pſalmiſt proves, and exemplifies in himſelf, ſaying, "I thought

thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy teſtimonies."*

3dly. *Self-examination is neceſſary* in order to excite, to improve and exerciſe our *graces*.—When a Chriſtian is engaged in meditating on the aſtoniſhing love of JEHOVAH, in giving his own dearly beloved Son to be a ſacrifice for ſin,—and alſo on the amazing humiliation, with the cruel ſufferings of the Lamb of God for his ſalvation, then will the warmeſt affections riſe in his ſoul; then will the higheſt tides of love and gratitude flow.—In like manner, when he reflects on the ungrateful returns he has made to his God and Saviour, grief and ſorrow pierce his heart, and raiſe within him an implacable hatred to ſin, which produces a ſincere repentance, that is not to be repented of. If ever the heart of man is capable of being inflamed with love to Chriſt, if there is but one ſpark of gratitude in the ſoul, it muſt be rouſed, it muſt burn, when we are at Golgotha, viewing the unparalleled ſufferings of the bleſſed Jeſus, hearing his expiring groans, and him praying, with his laſt breath, for his enemies and murderers.

4thly. This duty of *ſelf-examination* is highly *neceſſary*, as it is a great mean of preventing men from communicating *unworthily*, from be-

* Pſal. cxix. 59.

ing

ing "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord:" and conſequently of preſerving them from that puniſhment which God is pleaſed to inflict on ſome who raſhly, and without previous examination, come to the Lord's Table, and profane thoſe ſacred myſteries, not being "cleanſed according to the purification of the ſanctuary." Such was the caſe with many in the Church of Corinth. Becauſe of their unworthy communicating, many of them were puniſhed with weakneſs, with ſickneſs, and even with death; which puniſhment, by a timely and impartial ſelf-examination, might have been prevented.—But, without further enlarging, we ſhall proceed to make ſome IMPROVEMENT and APPLICATION of what has been ſaid.—And,

1ſt. If the work of *ſelf-examination* is ſo *neceſſary*, and productive of ſuch happy effects, is it not ſtrange, nay, truly lamentable, that it is ſo much, and ſo univerſally, neglected?—It is really aſtoniſhing to think what an averſion men have to this work; and how greatly it goes againſt their ſpirit. There is ſcarce any toil, ſcarce any drudgery on earth, that a man will not ſooner undergo, than ſit down, even for one hour, to examine his own heart.—When worldly gain is to be acquired, we willingly ſubmit to hear, to think, to deliberate and judge.

The

The Lawyer, for a fee, will muſe and ſtudy all day, over the proceſs of his Client.—The Merchant, for the ſake of profit, will not grudge to confine himſelf, for hours together, at his deſk, in examining his accounts, and making up his invoices.—Yea, there are many who, without fee or reward, will freely give their time and trouble to examine into the actions of their neighbours, and paſs their cenſures upon them; though they will not ſpend a ſingle minute in ſearching into their own hearts, where there is work ſufficient to employ all their time, and engroſs all their attention.

It may ſeem wonderful, but certain it is, that a man will rather hold converſe with any perſon in the world than with himſelf.—And though, in a phyſical ſenſe, a man is neareſt to himſelf, yet, in a moral ſenſe, nothing is farther from him than himſelf. He will a thouſand times rather amuſe his mind with the mereſt trifles upon earth, than ſit down in his cloſet, and ſeriouſly put theſe few ſhort queſtions to himſelf. What am I?—What was the end and deſign for which I was ſent into the world?—Whither am I going?—What will be my proſpects at a dying hour?—And what my portion through eternity?——No, my brethren; theſe would break our falſe peace, and diſturb our pleaſing

reveries.

reveries. Like one on the verge of bankruptcy, we are afraid to look into our books, and dread to know how matters ſtand between God and our ſouls: Nay, we are even ready to hate thoſe who would attempt to force us upon this work. If a Miniſter of Chriſt, in his zeal for our ſalvation, ſhould rouſe, or alarm us, with a ſearching Sermon, we are apt to diſlike him, and to ſay of him, as Ahab did of Micaiah, Away with this fellow; "I hate him; for he doth not propheſy good concerning me, but evil."*—But,

2dly. Notwithſtanding all this, let me try to perſuade you, my dear Auditors; to ſet about this neceſſary work immediately, however great your averſion to it, however many your difficulties in it may be.—Reſolve, in defiance of all your corruption, and in ſpite of all your enemies, who wiſh to keep you from it, to enter upon this buſineſs of ſelf-examination: and, for your great encouragement, know that God will not fail to give you all needful aſſiſtance.—Let ſuch, as have never looked into their own breaſt, pray to have a window opened there, that the light of the knowledge of God, and of yourſelves, may ſhine into it, and diſcover every vice that may lie hid in its darkeſt corners. Some ſins lie very

* 1 Kings xxii. 8.

deep;

deep; and, like Achan's golden wedge that was buried in the earth, cannot eaſily be diſcerned. Be therefore moſt careful in ſearching after them; and give not over the ſcrutiny, until you can, with ſome degree of confidence, addreſs God in theſe words of the pious ſon of Jeſſe, "Thou haſt proved mine heart; thou haſt viſited me in the night; thou haſt tried me, and ſhalt find nothing: I am purpoſed that my mouth ſhall not tranſgreſs."*

Conſider, my friends, that, although you ſhould always refuſe to examine your heart and ways, God will not.—He who "ſearcheth Jeruſalem with candles, and puniſheth the men that are ſettled on their lees,"† will not fail to ſearch every corner of your heart, and to diſcover the ſmalleſt grain of wickedneſs that may lie there concealed.—He will ſearch you by his *word*, by his *providence*, and by your own *conſcience*. He will examine you at *death*; and he will examine you at the great *tribunal*, where he will paſs the irrevocable ſentence.—Spare him as much of this trouble as poſſible, if I may ſo ſpeak; and judge yourſelves that ye be not judged.

3dly. Let me perſuade you to this neceſſary work, of preparation and *ſelf-examination*, by

* Pſal. xvii. 3. † Zeph. i. 12.

the

the example of your bleſſed Lord and Maſter.—Before the Lamb of God was offered in ſacrifice, he prepared himſelf for it. "For their ſakes," ſaid he, "I ſanctify myſelf."*—When he communicated with his diſciples, he ſang an hymn; then went to the garden of Gethſemane, and made his three-fold prayer, before he came to the altar on which he was offered.——Has Chriſt, your great propitiation, done ſo much to prepare himſelf for being an acceptable ſacrifice? And ſhall you, his profeſſed followers, refuſe to prepare yourſelves for fitly commemorating this grand ſacrifice, by which your ſalvation was purchaſed and obtained?——God forbid.

4thly. Having thus ſolemnly and deliberately, with the aſſiſtance of the Divine Spirit, examined and tried yourſelves, and drawn a juſt concluſion from clear and ſolid premiſes, then act accordingly.—If you muſt accuſe and condemn yourſelf, if you find no marks of a renewed ſoul within you, if you are perſuaded that you have hitherto been in a ſtate of deluſion, and walking in the way that leadeth to deſtruction, then, with all ſpeed, flee for refuge to the Hope ſet before you; run quickly to the footſtool of Mercy, and ceaſe not to importune

* Jo. xvii. 19.

God,

God, until he ſhall give you his Holy Spirit to begin, to carry on, and to perfect the good work of grace and ſanctification within you.

On the other hand, if you can ſafely conclude that you are a child of God; if you are ſatisfied that whereas once you was blind now you ſee; that once you was a hater of God, but now you love him; that formerly you rejected Chriſt, and lived in a ſtate of ſin and wickedneſs, but now you cordially embrace him, and delight in holineſs; then happy are ye: then thou mayeſt "go and eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works."

5thly. When you go to this ſpiritual feaſt, ſee that you entertain proper and becoming notions of it.—It is a plentiful feaſt, and abounds with every variety that the moſt capacious ſoul can deſire, that the moſt hungry or thirſty heart can crave.—Here is all that is good and great, all that is ſweet and excellent.—And never did a ſoul that truly hungered and thirſted after righteouſneſs, come from it empty and unſatisfied.—Beſides, this feaſt is perfectly ſuited to the taſte of all Chriſt's ſanctified ones. They find his "fleſh to be meat indeed; and his blood to be drink indeed;" of which food the ſpiritually appetized Believer has often greatly

longed to partake; and, in the proſpect of ſo doing, thus ſolaced himſelf, "My ſoul ſhall be ſatisfied as with marrow and fatneſs; and my mouth ſhall praiſe thee with joyful lips."*—— Having made the experiment, and finding his expectations anſwered, and all his deſires ſatisfied, he goes from the Banqueting-houſe with a glad heart, ſinging this ſoothing requiem to his delighted ſpirit, "Return unto thy reſt, O my ſoul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee."†

In fine, this feaſt to which you are invited has a property peculiar to itſelf, and in which it excells all others.—It is a *life-giving* feaſt. The moſt luxurious and ſplendid earthly banquet cannot prolong life, ſo as to prevent death:—but he that eateth of "this bread that came down from heaven, ſhall live for ever."‡—Yes, Chriſtians, Chriſt's broken body and ſhed blood are the food that nouriſheth the renewed ſoul, and "the wine that goeth down ſweetly, cauſing the lips of thoſe that are aſleep to ſpeak."—Come, O Believer, come and feaſt on theſe celeſtial viands: for your eating is neceſſary, as well as your ſelf-examination; the one being the *mean*, and the other the *end*.——Beſides, "Except ye eat the fleſh of the Son of Man,

* Pſal. lxiii. 5. † Pſal. cxvi. 7. ‡ Jo. vi. 58.

and

and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."* Come with enlarged appetites; and open your mouth wide, that God may fill it. Who knows but that Chriſt may give you ſuch a view of himſelf at his table, as will fill your ſoul with divine raptures; and make you to cry out, in the words of aged Simeon, "Lord, now letteſt thou thy ſervant depart in peace; for mine eyes have ſeen thy ſalvation."†—Let me die with my incarnate God in the arms of my faith; let me ſhut mine eyes on all terreſtrial objects; and, embracing the Prince of Peace, bid adieu to the world: for my ſalvation is accompliſhed; and my joys are full.

God grant that all of us may enjoy theſe comforts through life, with that bleſſed hope, and that full aſſurance of ſalvation, in death; for our glorious Redeemer's ſake. Amen.

* Jo. vi. 53. † Luke ii. 29, 30.

SERMON VII.

STEDFASTNESS AND PERSEVERANCE IN SPIRITUAL DUTIES.

REVELATION III. 11.

HOLD THAT FAST WHICH THOU HAST, THAT NO MAN TAKE THY CROWN.

THESE words are a part of Chriſt's epiſtle to the Church of Philadelphia, an ancient town of the Leſſer Aſia, about forty miles eaſt of Smyrna, and now in ruins. It was then famous for nothing, except its having one of the pureſt Chriſtian Churches on earth. This we learn from the commendations here beſtowed upon her; from the promiſes and encouragements given her; and alſo from her Lord's not blaming, or cenſuring, her in any thing, as he did all the other Churches to which he wrote, that of Smyrna excepted.—But, notwithſtanding her former conſtancy and patience, ſhe is here exhorted to ſtedfaſtneſs in faith and good works. This is always neceſſary; as the beſt of Chriſ-

tians are expoſed to temptations, are apt to become remiſs in the duty of watchfulneſs; yea, are naturally inclined to backſlide from God. For theſe, and many other reaſons, they need to be often cautioned againſt remiſsneſs in duty, and a falling away from Chriſt.—Having once put on his yoke, we muſt not throw it off again; having begun in the ſpirit, we muſt not end in the fleſh; for "no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." It will nothing avail us to follow Chriſt for a ſeaſon, and afterwards to deſert him; or to perform for a time the works which he hath commanded, and then go over to the ſervice of ſin and Satan. No, my friends, they only who are "faithful unto death ſhall receive the crown of life;" and ſuch as "endure unto the end, the ſame ſhall be ſaved."—It is the characteriſtick of all Chriſt's houſhold, That they "hold faſt the confidence, and the rejoicing of *their* hope firm unto the end." Nothing is more neceſſary than this; ſeeing "it is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlightened, and have taſted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, and have taſted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they fall away, to renew them again unto repentance: ſeeing they

they crucify to themſelves the Son of God afreſh, and put him to an open ſhame." This *holding faſt that which we have*, is a moſt important and ſerious matter, a thing in which we are all intereſted, and which we ought moſt earneſtly to lay to heart: eſpecially ſuch of us as have made an open and public profeſſion of Chriſt, at a ſacramental Table; and, over the ſymbols of his broken body and ſhed blood, made a voluntary dedication of ourſelves to God, ſolemnly engaging to keep his commandments, to follow his example, and to walk even as he walked.*

In this verſe the Church is exhorted to hold faſt her integrity, her fidelity, and patience, from theſe two conſiderations; *Firſt*, From the ſhortneſs of her ſufferings, which would all terminate at her Lord's coming quickly to deliver his faithful people, and take vengeance on their enemies:—*Second*, Becauſe of the danger of loſing her *crown*, through a want of firmneſs and perſeverance; even that crown of life and glory which her Lord had promiſed, as the reward of her patience, her ſtedfaſtneſs and ſufferings. "Hold that faſt which thou haſt, that no man take thy crown." Hence it is evident, That every perſevering Chriſtian ſhall finally be crowned; and that each ſhall have his own par-

* Preached after the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

ticular and ſeparate crown: differing, perhaps, in degrees of glory, but in quality the ſame. They ſhall all "ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament;" but may differ in degrees of luſtre as much as "one ſtar differeth from another ſtar in glory."

To *excite* you to *perſeverance* in duty,—and to *encourage* you to hold on in a courſe of righteouſneſs, even unto the end of life,—ſhall be the main ſcope and deſign of this our preſent exerciſe.

And may that God who giveth ſtrength to the weak, impart unto us a ſufficiency of divine fortitude and wiſdom, whereby we may be able to withſtand all the aſſaults and artifices of our enemies, and to hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith, without wavering, until we come to poſſeſs the promiſed crown and kingdom, which ſhall never be raviſhed from us.

I. Nothing is more neceſſary, or more becoming, in a follower of Jeſus Chriſt, than a conſtant and ſteady perſeverance in duty; to which we have many powerful motives and ſtrong incitements. The Chriſtian life is repreſented in Scripture by various ſimilitudes and metaphors; particularly by thoſe of a continual *warfare*,—a conſtant *wreſtling*,—and a *race*, or *courſe*.—But under

under whatever idea we conſider it, in whatever view we behold it, we find that ſtedfaſtneſs and perſeverance are abſolutely neceſſary to our obtaining the victory and the prize; that is, the eternal ſalvation of our precious ſouls.

1ſt. If we conſider the Chriſtian life as a continual *warfare*, we will find it indiſpenſably neceſſary to be ſtill on our guard, to be always armed and ready to oppoſe the hoſtile invaſion of our enemies; whoſe aſſaults are conſtant, and without intermiſſion. The chief and moſt formidable of our ſpiritual foes are, the *Devil*, the *World*, and the *Fleſh*.—The firſt of thoſe, filled with murderous envy at the happineſs of man, whom he looks upon as his ſupplanter, labours, with all his might, to deſtroy it. For which purpoſe, he ſets all his engines at work, leaving no means untried, which artifice and cunning can invent, or which force and violence can uſe. Perfectly ſkilled in the ſoul-deſtroying art, he walketh about either as an angel of light, ſeeking whom he may deceive and enſnare; or "like a roaring lion, ſeeking whom he may devour."

On the other hand, the *World* attacks us in various ways. It tries to lead us from the paths of duty by its allurements, its riches, its honours and pleaſures; therewith flattering our vanity,

vanity, provoking our ambition, and promiſing us happineſs. If theſe fail, it aſſails us with its frowns, its contempt, its hatred, its hereſies and perſecutions. Thus beſet, how is it poſſible for ſuch weak and impotent creatures to withſtand, and to hold faſt that which we have, unleſs we are conſtantly on our guard, unleſs we are always confiding in, and drawing continual ſupplies of divine ſtrength from him, who hath overcome the world?

Beſides thoſe potent enemies, we have to encounter with the *Fleſh*, the moſt formidable and dangerous of them all; for it powerfully aids the others, not merely by giving force and effect to their temptations, but alſo by its being ever preſent with us. Wherever we are, whereever we go, it is inceſſantly attacking us with its ſinful luſts, its unlawful deſires, its irregular paſſions and criminal affections.—Thoſe are all inveterate foes to the Chriſtian; artful, as well as revengeful. Yet, thoſe he muſt ſtedfaſtly reſiſt; yea, attack and combat in their cloſeſt entrenchments; not only once and again, but even to the end of life: for no ſooner can a complete victory be obtained. But leſt the Chriſtian warriour ſhould faint under his toils, the Captain of his ſalvation has, for his encouragement, thus declared, "He that overcom-

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eth, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations :—even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning ſtar."*

2dly. If we conſider the Chriſtian life as a conſtant *wreſtling*, or ſtriving, not only "againſt fleſh and blood, but againſt Principalities, againſt Powers, againſt the Rulers of the darkneſs of this world, againſt ſpiritual wickedneſs in high places," we may readily conceive how neceſſary courage, conſtancy and perſeverance muſt be unto us : and more eſpecially, when we conſider that thoſe, our implacable enemies, cannot be totally vanquiſhed until the hour of death.—Through life the conflict is without intermiſſion ; and we may ſay of them, as God does of the Leviathan, " The ſword of him that layeth at *them* cannot hold ; the ſpear, the dart, nor the habergeon. *They* eſteem iron as ſtraw, and braſs as rotten wood. The arrow cannot make *them* flee : ſling ſtones are turned with *them* into ſtubble. Darts are counted as ſtubble ; *they* laugh at the ſhaking of a ſpear."† This is indeed a ſore ſtruggle, and a violent conflict : but there is no receiving the crown before it is ended ; and until, with our bodies, we ſhall have put off our armour.

* Rev. ii. 26, 27, 28. † Job xli. 26, &c.

3dly.

3dly. If we view the Chriſtian life under the idea of a *race*, or courſe, we ſhall find that conſtancy and perſeverance therein is no leſs neceſſary.—In this race there is no halting, no abating of our ſpeed, before we reach the goal; if we would obtain the prize. It will nothing avail us to have run ſo far over the Chriſtian courſe, if we ſtop ſhort before it is finiſhed. The world will throw down her golden apples to enchant our eyes, to draw us aſide from the ſtraight path, and to retard our ſpeed, by gathering them. But remember, That if we are ſo infatuated as to ſuffer our ſenſual hearts to be captivated therewith, if we are ſo mean and avaricious as to ſtoop to take them up, we forfeit all claim, and muſt give up every pretence to the prize. Thus it is evident, that, under whatever idea we conſider the Chriſtian life, perſeverance in the ways of religion, and in the practice of godlineſs, is abſolutely neceſſary.

But, perhaps, ſome humble ſoul, ſenſible of his own weakneſs, and conſcious of his inability to withſtand, far leſs to overcome, ſuch artful, malicious, and powerful enemies, or to undergo ſo many toils, and labours, and ſelf-denials, may be ready to deſpair, and give up his cauſe for loſt.—For the confirming and ſtrengthening of all ſuch, let me obſerve,—That though

though our foes are inveterate, ſtrong, and formidable, yet they are not invincible. The Captain of our ſalvation has already vanquiſhed and ſpoiled them; and, through him, all his faithful followers ſhall alſo conquer. In his engagement with them much did he ſuffer: In it he fell; but, in his fall, he conquered;—in his death he triumphed: and, like him, all thoſe who keep cloſe to his ſtandard ſhall alſo triumph.

Beſides, our glorious Leader hath provided a moſt noble Armoury for the uſe of his Church-militant; from which the Chriſtian warriour may be fitted with complete armour, either for offence or defence. There he may have the Girdle of truth, the Breaſt-plate of righteouſneſs, Shoes of the Goſpel of Peace, the Shield of faith, the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit, with whatever elſe may be uſeful and neceſſary. But know, my friends, that this noble armour is not for the cowardly and faint-hearted: nor would it be of any ſervice unto him. It is the Chriſtian hero, it is the bold, the intrepid ſoldier of Jeſus, and he only, who can uſe it to honour and advantage.

Or, ſhould it ever happen, as, through the weakneſs and infirmity of our nature, it undoubtedly may, that your courage fails, and a tremour

tremour ſeizes you at the thought of ſuch formidable and hoſtile bands, then "lift up your eyes unto the hills from whence your help cometh;" remembering, That "in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlaſting ſtrength;" and that he will not fail to communicate thereof according to your need. Be always in the way of duty; and leave the iſſue to God, to whom it belongs. If *Satan* attacks you with ſecret wiles, or open violence, call to mind the Apoſtle's advice, "Reſiſt the Devil, and he will flee from you."* The true means to triumph over this wicked ſpirit are reſiſtance and watchfulneſs, prayer and faſting. Whatever advantages he gains over us is greatly owing to ourſelves. For were we always on our watch-tower, did we conſtantly keep the door of our heart ſhut, ſo that he could find no entrance, he would certainly withdraw. "Watch," therefore, "and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."—"Be ſober, be vigilant; becauſe your adverſary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, ſeeking whom he may devour: whom reſiſt ſtedfaſt in the faith."

As for the *World*, the Chriſtian hero is conqueror over it, when he valiantly encounters it with "the ſword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."—He alſo overcometh the world

* James iv. 7.

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in refuſing to be conformable unto it, and to the ſinful examples therein ſet before him; chooſing rather to be ſingular, than to follow a multitude to do evil.——He riſes ſuperior to the World, in living ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly; thereby imitating the holy and bleſſed Jeſus, who is the only example of all perfection.—The Chriſtian likewiſe overcometh the world, in patiently bearing the trials, the troubles and afflictions to which he is expoſed, during the years of his pilgrimage. He rejoiceth in tribulation; having the delightful proſpect of future and immortal pleaſures. He oppoſes to his preſent ſufferings "the glory that ſhall be revealed in us;" and longs for "the appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt," who will rid him of all his troubles; and convince him that the afflictions of this life were all deſigned to work out for him, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." In fine, we overcome the world in contemning its glory, in deſpiſing its honours, its riches, its pleaſures; in comparing things terreſtrial with things celeſtial; in oppoſing to the vain glory of this world, which vaniſheth as in a moment, that eternal weight of glory which fadeth not; to the periſhing riches of time, the incorruptible treaſures of eternity; and to the mean, the unſatisfying

unſatisfying pleaſures of ſenſe, the pure, the exalted and permanent pleaſures of the heavenly paradiſe.—Finally,

We are conquerors over the *Fleſh* when, through the ſpirit, we reſiſt its motions, and temptations, to ſin; when we mortify the deeds of the body; when we ſubdue our vicious and diſorderly paſſions, crucify our vile and ſenſual luſts, with our carnal affections.——In ſhort, when we are both willing and ready to leave all, to give up all, even life itſelf, if required at our hand, for the glory of our divine Maſter; whoſe croſs we cheerfully take up, denying ourſelves, and following him.—In this manner muſt the Chriſtian ſoldier *fight*, *wreſtle* and *run*, if he would hold faſt that which he hath, and finally receive the promiſed crown of glory that fadeth not away.

II. To encourage you to *hold faſt* your Chriſtian profeſſion, and to *perſevere* in a courſe of holineſs, even unto the end, many powerful motives might here be urged: but, for the preſent, I ſhall only beg of you to conſider ſeriouſly the great *advantages* that reſult from ſuch a conduct; whether it reſpects the *Honour* that attends it,—the *Peace* that flows from it,—the *Safety* that is in it,—or the *Reward* that is annexed

nexed unto it.—In all theſe reſpects the advantage is great.

1ſt. That keeping cloſe to Chriſt, and perſevering in obedience to his laws, is advantageous in regard to the *honour* that attends it, is clearly intimated in the words of the text, "Hold that faſt which thou haſt, that no man take thy crown."—Some Commentators take the *crown*, here mentioned, for that honour which Chriſt puts upon the Church, in the 9th verſe, ſaying, "Behold, I will make them of the ſynagogue of Satan, which ſay they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worſhip before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."—And what greater honour can poſſibly be enjoyed, than to be publicly acknowledged, before angels and men, as an object of God's love; to have our enemies to come and worſhip at our feet! Nevertheleſs, great as it is, this honour have all his ſaints.—What encouragement to hold faſt that which we have got, that profeſſion we have made, that grace we have received, and that obedience which we have wrought! This is Chriſt's counſel to his Church; and bleſſed are all they who carefully follow it. Verily, my brethren, conſtancy and perſeverance in the ways of righteouſneſs are the crown and the honour of a Chriſtian.

2dly. The holding faſt the profeſſion of our faith without wavering is highly advantageous in reſpect to the *peace* that accompanies it.—Nothing contributes more to the comfort and happineſs of a Chriſtian, nothing ſecures his peace more certainly, than conſtancy in obedience.—"Great peace have they," ſaith the Pſalmiſt, "who love thy law: and nothing ſhall offend them."* As there is a peace which flows from juſtification and a ſenſe of pardoned ſin, ſo there is a peace that reſults from a perſeverance in the way of holineſs: To this the Apoſtle of the Gentiles bears teſtimony, ſaying, "As many as walk according to this rule, *peace* be on them, and mercy."† Conſtancy in obedience, and ſtedfaſtneſs in the faith, bring along with them a continual and uninterrupted peace of mind, a ſerenity and compoſure of ſpirit, which neither the ſmiles nor the frowns of this world can diſcompoſe or deſtroy.—But,

3dly. Another great advantage which ariſes from holding faſt our allegiance to Chriſt, and obedience to his commandments, is perfect *ſafety*.—"Whoſo hearkeneth unto me," ſaith Wiſdom, "ſhall dwell ſafely, and ſhall be quiet from fear of evil."‡—"The fear of man bringeth a ſnare; but whoſo putteth his truſt in the

* Pſal. cxix. 165. † Gal. vi. 16. ‡ Prov. i. 33.

Lord

Lord ſhall be ſafe."* "Righteouſneſs keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedneſs overthroweth the ſinner."† What ignorant and infatuated fools muſt they then be, who run into ſin to avoid ſuffering! It is venturing life itſelf to ſave a thing of no value: and equally abſurd as if a ſailor ſhould ſink the ſhip, on purpoſe to avoid the ſtorm. "The man that keepeth the commandment keepeth his own ſoul." Whilſt in the way of duty, a man is ever in ſafety; and a conſcientious obedience to the divine Precepts will always ſecure the protection of Omnipotence. "He that walketh uprightly walketh ſurely:"—"he ſhall dwell on high; his place of defence ſhall be the munitions of rocks; bread ſhall be given him; his waters ſhall be ſure."

4thly. The advantage, which flows from conſtancy and perſeverance in godlineſs, is great, in reſpect of the *reward* that awaits the righteous.—"To them who by patient continuance in well-doing ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality," is promiſed "eternal life."‡—How vaſtly inferior the work to the wages!—Short is the duration of our ſervice; but long ſhall be the enjoyment of our reward. It is but for a few years, at moſt, that we can do ho-

* Prov. xxix. 25. † Prov. xiii. 6. ‡ Rom. ii. 7.

nour and ſervice to God in this world; but our wages ſhall be continued through eternity.—How kind, how generous a Maſter is Chriſt! And how unſpeakably great the advantages of keeping cloſe to him, in the way of duty! True is that ſaying of the Apoſtle, "Eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."* Turn not aſide then, O Chriſtians, from the paths of rectitude, from the ſtraight way in which your divine Maſter walked; and which, if perſevered in, will finally bring you to the poſſeſſion of immortal felicity: but "let him that is righteous, be righteous ſtill: and he that is holy, let him be holy ſtill."

Conſider, my brethren, what a ſhame and diſhonour you put upon Chriſt, by throwing off his yoke, after having voluntarily put it on; by apoſtatizing from him, after having choſen him, known him, and made a publick profeſſion of your faith in him!—For a man to acknowledge his ſubjection to the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and his Laws, and afterwards to forſake *him*, and reject *them*, is ſaying, in plain terms, That he is a bad Maſter; and that his ſervice is unpleaſant and unprofitable: it is a "crucifying the Son

* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

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of God afreſh, and putting the *Saviour* to an open ſhame." No man can be ſuppoſed to have taken Chriſt's yoke upon him, but he who has been ſatisfied of the juſtice and equity of his precepts. He muſt alſo have found ſome peace of conſcience in ſo doing; he muſt have "taſted" ſomewhat "of the heavenly gift," experienced ſome gracious operations "of the Holy Ghoſt, and taſted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come;" and therefore, to throw away all theſe, and to prefer the ways of ſin and Satan, muſt be a crime of the greateſt magnitude.

Beſides, apoſtatizing from Chriſt is not only reproachful and diſhonourable to *him*, but dangerous and fatal to *ourſelves*.—It not only proves that our hearts were never right with God, but we thereby incur the loſs of all we may have formerly done, or ſuffered, for Chriſt. By this our faith is ſhipwrecked; our prayers, our alms, our fervour and zeal, our ſtrivings and watchings againſt ſin, will all be counted as nothing. When a Nazarite, under the Law, during the days of his ſeparation, met with any defilement, all the time paſt was loſt, and held as nothing: he had all to begin again, "becauſe his ſeparation was defiled."* So it is with profeſſors of

* Num. vi. 12.

Religion; for, if they draw back, all is loſt.—It is not ſo much how we begin, as how we end our Chriſtian race: for as the tree falleth, ſo it muſt lie. It will profit a man nothing to begin his life in holineſs, if he ends it in wickedneſs; to be zealous for God, during a ſeaſon, and afterwards equally ſo for the Devil; to live, for a time, like a ſaint, and die like a ſinner. This is evident from theſe words of the Prophet Ezekiel, "When the righteous turneth away from his righteouſneſs, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked doeth, ſhall he live? All his righteouſneſs that he hath done ſhall not be mentioned: in his treſpaſs that he hath treſpaſſed, and in his ſin that he hath ſinned, in them ſhall he die."* The Chriſtian's life muſt be regular, ſteady and uniform; but always advancing with growing ſtrength. "The righteous ſhall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands ſhall be ſtronger and ſtronger." "The path of the juſt is as the ſhining light, that ſhineth more and more unto the perfect day." But, as for thoſe who "have known the way of righteouſneſs, and after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them," their crime is greater than that of ſuch

* Chap. xviii. 24.

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men as have habitually lived in open profanity, and never put on even the appearance of ſanctity. Of all ſuch apoſtates as draw back from him, and deſert his ſervice, God hath declared, That his ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in them.*

Permit me likewiſe to obſerve, That there is no poſſibility of being ſaved without poſſeſſing the Chriſtian graces; more eſpecially theſe three, which are the chief of them, *Faith*, *Hope*, and *Charity*.—Now, there is no true *faith* but that which "worketh by love," which purifieth the heart, and overcometh the world.—Nor is there any real *hope* but what is founded on the grace, the ſacrifice, the righteouſneſs, and interceſſion of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt; on the earneſt of the Holy Spirit in our hearts; on the almighty power, and the unchangeable truth of God himſelf. Now, he "that hath this hope in him purifieth himſelf even as *God* is pure."—Neither is there any real *charity* but that which flows from a principle of prevailing love to God, and good-will to men; which powerfully inclines us to glorify the One, and do good to the other. This is a grace that is never loſt; it goes with us into another world, and is exerciſed in heaven itſelf, where faith and hope ſhall ceaſe. Thus, by perſeverance in holineſs, we alſo make it mani-

* Heb. x. 38.

feſt that thoſe celeſtial virtues exiſt in our hearts.

Here, I may alſo obſerve, That all the promiſes of life and ſalvation, of ineffable glory and everlaſting happineſs in the world to come, are made to thoſe, and thoſe only, who perſevere in the ways of God, who hold faſt the profeſſion of their faith, and finally overcome. This is apparent from the promiſes made in this, and the preceding chapter, to the ſeven Churches in Aſia; as well as from numberleſs other paſſages of the inſpired writings.

This being the caſe, and ſince perſeverance in holineſs is abſolutely neceſſary to our ſalvation, ſince we muſt fight and conquer before we receive the victor's crown, and run before we obtain the prize, let us exert ourſelves in the ſtrength of the Lord, aſſume freſh courage, "quit ourſelves like men, and be ſtrong," knowing that in due ſeaſon we ſhall reap, if we faint not.—The weapons given us, wherewith to fight the battles of the Lord, are mighty and powerful: let us wield them valiantly in his cauſe; being fully perſuaded, that ſtronger is he that is for us, than all that are againſt us.

But if, at any time, we ſhould perceive our courage failing, and find ourſelves ready to ſink under the violent and repeated aſſaults of our ghoſtly

ghoſtly enemies, let us call to mind the reviving and ſoul-ſtrengthening promiſe given to the Apoſtle Paul, when ſorely wounded in the ſpiritual conflict, "My grace is ſufficient for thee: for my ſtrength is made perfect in weakneſs."* Then, inſtead of giving up the combat, we ſhall, with him, "rather glory in our infirmities, that the power of Chriſt may reſt upon us." And although, of ourſelves, we can do nothing, yet, in him, we can do all things. *Satan* may ſeek to deſtroy us; but *faith* is a buckler that will quench all his fiery darts.—The *World* will uſe every poſſible mean to draw us from God, and the paths of duty; but let us beware of yielding to its ſolicitations. Let us value neither its promiſes nor its threatenings; but keep the eye of the ſoul ſtedfaſtly fixed on the things that are above.—We may experience within us the *Fleſh* luſting againſt the *Spirit*, and "a law in our members warring againſt the law of our mind," preventing us from doing good, even when we would incline to perform it. Nevertheleſs, we muſt not be diſcouraged. The grace of God is able to mortify and ſubdue theſe our inward foes, and to bring the moſt rebellious heart into ſubjection to his righteous laws. This grace, this divine aſſiſtance, is promiſed to all who ſincerely aſk it. Let us not be backward in ſo doing

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

ing; but earneſtly, and at all times, ſolicit it by fervent prayer and ſupplication. Let us beſeech "the Father of Mercies, and God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation," to ſupport us under all our conflicts, to render us invincible againſt all the malicious efforts of earth and hell; and to grant, that, after having fought the good fight, finiſhed our courſe, and kept the faith, we may receive "that crown of righteouſneſs, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give unto all them that love his appearing."—Yes, my brethren, the crown of Glory ſhall ſucceed to a life of perſeverance; and be given to all thoſe who have not only begun well, but have likewiſe held faſt the profeſſion of their faith ſtedfaſt unto the end. Like Moſes, have "reſpect to the recompenſe of reward." And, under all your preſent trials and ſufferings, comfort your heart with the proſpect of joys to come; of pleaſures which will never pall in the enjoyment; and of glories which will never fade, tarniſh, nor wax old.—Having theſe lively hopes of a bleſſed immortality, "therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye ſtedfaſt, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, foraſmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

SERMON

SERMON VIII.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MERCIFUL.

MATTHEW V. 7.

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL: FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.

IN the exerciſe of Mercy, the darling attribute of Heaven, man moſt nearly reſembles his Maker.—In God, it is that eſſential perfection of his nature, by which he is led to pity and relieve the miſeries of his creatures.—In man, it is that ſympathy, that melting diſpoſition of ſoul, which makes us lay to heart the troubles, the calamities and neceſſities of others; and excites us, on all occaſions, to be inſtrumental in doing them good.—*Charity* and *Mercy* are two ſiſter graces; agreeing in ſome things, and differing in others. Charity differs from Mercy in being more general and extenſive.—Every man, whatever be his condition, is the object of our *love*, which is the ſame with *Charity*: but it is the poor and needy, the perſecuted and helpleſs,

helpleſs, the miſerable and afflicted, that are the objects of our *mercy*. Love is like a friend, that viſits the healthful and the happy. Mercy is like a phyſician, who viſits thoſe only that are in ſickneſs and diſtreſs. But they both agree in having bowels of compaſſion, and in being always ready to ſuccour the wretched.

Had man continued in his primitive and happy ſtate, Mercy would have had no object to excite it, no ſubject whereon to work. But, ever ſince his unhappy fall, ſince that day on which the earth was curſed for man's ſake, and it pleaſed God to puniſh ſin by temporal troubles, fit objects of compaſſion have every where been found. The world is now become like a great hoſpital, every corner of which is full of ſick and miſerable patients. There is not a part on this terreſtrial ball, which does not reſemble the five porches of Bethesda, where we may not behold perſons labouring under divers infirmities. In this hapleſs ſtate, Heaven does not ſend down an angel to trouble the waters, and heal the afflicted by a miracle. Nor doth the Lord ſend a meſſenger from above to comfort them, as he formerly did Hagar; nor command the ravens to carry them food, as he did to Elijah; but the merciful are as angels among men, by whoſe means God does a thouſand miracles in favour

favour of poor, afflicted ſinners. They are rivulets, by which he waters the parched earth; by which fainting ſouls are revived and comforted.—Mercy is a reciprocal virtue which we owe to one another. No man was made ſolely for himſelf. We are all linked together by the chain of neceſſity: nor may any one, however great, however happy in his preſent circumſtances, ſay, even to the meaneſt of his fellow mortals, "I have no need of thee." There is no health ſo firmly eſtabliſhed, which a fit of ſickneſs will not ſoon impair: no fortune ſo ſtable, but an unexpected blow may overturn: and no proſperity ſo conſtant, as to be always free from adverſity. It is then hardly to be ſuppoſed that we ſhall never need the conſolation, the aid and ſupport of other men: And as we would naturally wiſh them not to refuſe us, when our condition requires it, ſo Reaſon itſelf teaches us not to refuſe the ſame ſympathy, and the ſame relief, which we would expect from them in a ſimilar ſtate.

In further proſecuting our ſubject, I ſhall attempt—FIRST, To give you ſome diſtinct ideas of thoſe perſons who, in the Text, are denominated *Merciful:* and alſo of the *duties* practiſed by them.—SECONDLY, We ſhall make a few obſervations on the *happineſs*, or *bleſſedneſs*, of

of the truly *merciful*.—THIRDLY, Uſe a few *motives*, or *arguments*, to excite you to the practice of this god-like virtue.

And may the Lord now bleſs our labours; by making them the means of inciting us to ſhow kindneſs and mercy to all who require our ſympathy and help; that we thereby may be entitled to apply the gracious promiſe here given, for our preſent and future conſolation.

I. We ſhall attempt to give you ſome diſtinct ideas of thoſe perſons who, in the Text, are denominated "*Merciful:*" and alſo of the *duties* practiſed by them.

Theſe words of our Lord are general, and mention not any particular inſtance of compaſſion, more than another; and therefore they, undoubtedly, comprehend, under the term *merciful*, every kind of mercy whatever; whether to the *ſouls*, the *bodies*, the *characters*, or *eſtates*, of our brethren of mankind.—Nevertheleſs, they have a ſpecial eye to thoſe two, which our Lord, and his Apoſtles, often, and earneſtly, inculcated, namely, The *forgiving of Injuries*,—and the *giving of Alms*.—By the *Merciful*, we are therefore to underſtand, Thoſe *meek* and *charitable* Chriſtians, who, full of tenderneſs to their fellow-creatures, do all in their power to promote

mote their temporal and eternal happineſs; and are particularly ready to *forgive* and to *communicate*.—Thoſe duties are both indiſpenſably neceſſary: But on this occaſion we ſhall chiefly confine ourſelves to the *latter*, as being the particular duty, for the performance of which we are this day called together.*

Thoſe, whom the Son of God dignifies with the epithet of *merciful*, are ſuch as are continually and habitually ſo. Not thoſe who are charitable by ſtarts, and now and then beneficent, as caprice, or humour, leads them; liberal on ſome occaſions, but niggardly and churliſh on others. It is not a tranſient act of this virtue that will entitle a man to the character of the *merciful*. It muſt be an habitual, a conſtant, and perſevering courſe of charity and beneficence that conſtitutes the merciful man. There are, doubtleſs, ſome men more merciful than others by their natural Conſtitution; and ſome by the precepts of Morality; but all thoſe differ materially from ſuch as are ſo by Grace and the

* This Sermon was preached on Eaſter Monday, 1793, being the Anniverſary Meeting of the Managers and Supporters of the Charity-School in Shakeſpear's Walk, Shadwell:—and deſired to be publiſhed by ſome of the moſt reſpectable Patrons and Patroneſſes of that Charity.—And the Author hopes that a candid Publick will excuſe his inſerting ſome particulars reſpecting that, and the other newly founded inſtitution, belonging to the ſame place.

laws of Chriſtianity. It is the latter claſs, not the former, whom the Saviour of the World pronounces *bleſſed*; and to whom he promiſes *mercy*. Such have nobler ends in view than the praiſe of men; and they look not for their recompenſe until the reſurrection of the juſt.—Our Conſtitutions may give us ſome happy diſpoſitions, and Reaſon may improve them; but Grace only can perfect them.——Nature may give us humanity; Law and Government may make us juſt; but Grace and the Goſpel make us truly merciful. Real Chriſtians ſhould have, as it were, but one ſoul, and one life, as they have but one and the ſame Father, the ſame Saviour, the ſame Sanctifier, the ſame Faith, and the ſame heavenly Inheritance. They are all Members of the ſame Body, and therefore ought, as much as poſſible, to bear with, and to ſuccour one another.

As man is compoſed of two eſſential parts, a *Body* and a *Soul*, ſo *Mercy* may be divided into two kinds. The one reſpects our *material*, and the other our *immaterial* part.—True Mercy will not confine its pity to the evils which afflict our outward man; and which conſpire to pull down the earthly tabernacle. It will extend its compaſſion to the ſoul alſo; whoſe maladies are more numerous, and likewiſe more dangerous.

dangerous.—Spiritual mercy conſiſts in prudent and friendly advice, in brotherly reproof, conſolation in his affliction, fervent prayer for his relief, bearing with his failings, pardoning when he offends.—But on this ſpiritual mercy it is not our intention to enlarge, at the preſent time.

As to the *duties* which the truly merciful will not fail to put in practice, they may all be comprehended in theſe *two*, namely, to *ſympathize with*,—and to *relieve*; to feel for the diſtreſs of our brethren, and to adminiſter comfort unto them under their afflictions. This we have exemplified in the conduct of Pharaoh's daughter.* When ſhe beheld the little infant, Moſes, in his ark of bulruſhes, lying upon the waters, his tears touched her heart, and raiſed compaſſion in her ſoul. Mercy called upon her for ſuccour;—and ſhe hearkened to the melting voice. She ſent to draw him out of the waters; ſhe hired for him a nurſe; ſhe cauſed him to be brought up and educated as her own ſon.—See it alſo beautifully illuſtrated in the conduct of the good Samaritan, whom our bleſſed Lord holds out for an example to the Jews. In him we have the character of the truly merciful.—This deſpiſed ſtranger meets with a hapleſs

* Exod. ii. 5, &c.

man, whom the robbers had plundered, and left half dead; whoſe woful ſituation could raiſe no pity in the unfeeling breaſts of the Prieſt and the Levite, who, at ſeeing him, "paſſed by on the other ſide."*—But no ſooner did the tender-hearted Samaritan behold this ſpectacle of horrour and diſtreſs, than he was moved with compaſſion. Here was his *ſympathy*, or fellow-feeling. But here it ſtopped not:—It was productive of *action*.—He approached the wounded traveller; he tenderly bound up his wounds, having firſt poured wine and oil into them; he ſet him on his own beaſt; carried him to an inn; paid his expences; recommended him to the care of the landlord, with a promiſe of ſatisfying him ſtill more liberally, for the trouble he might afterwards have with him. Here is a true picture of Mercy!—He gave all that he could give; his compaſſion, his attention, his remedies, and his money. Noble example!—But, alas, how few are his imitators!—How unlike to this Samaritan are thoſe who harden their hearts againſt pity; and, without a ſigh, or a tear, can behold the keeneſt anguiſh of others! Surely, Chriſtianity was never intended to render our hearts callous and inſenſible!—No, my brethren, quite the reverſe; as is evident in the

* Luke x. 32.

life,

life, as well as in the converſation of the bleſſed Jeſus, of whom we are to learn. He wept over the tomb of his friend Lazarus; thereby expreſſing the tender feelings of his ſoul. He then ordered the ſtone to be taken from the door of his ſepulchre; which being done, he called him back into life, and raiſed him up from the grave.* —Nor was it only over the grave of his friend that Jeſus wept; but even over Jeruſalem, the city of his enemies, when He thought of its dreadful end, and the unequalled calamities that were ſoon to befall it.——He had compaſſion on the multitudes that followed him into the deſert, and wrought a miracle for their ſuſtenance. Nor did ever the ſick, the lame, the blind, or the helpleſs, implore his aid in vain.

Theſe, my brethren, are the *feelings*, and theſe the *actions* of the merciful man, to whom our Lord promiſes *bleſſedneſs:* in which fruits of the Spirit we are called to abound more and more.—— —Mercy is not ſatisfied with our having uttered a few ſighs, ſhed a few tears, or preſented a few petitions to Heaven for the wretched, when it is in our power to bring them more effectual relief. "The liberal ſoul deviſeth liberal things." He viſiteth the fatherleſs and widows in their diſtreſs:—He gives his bread to the hungry,

* Jo. xi. 35, &c.

and his clothing to the naked:—He puts not off the needy with the barren kindneſs of words only; a kindneſs of which the Apoſtle James thus complains, "If a brother or a ſiſter be naked and deſtitute of daily food; and one of you ſay unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled, notwithſtanding ye give them not thoſe things that are needful to the body, what doth it profit?"*—Real Mercy gives the moſt effectual relief to the diſtreſſed: and is inquiſitive to know how, or by what means, it may be moſt beneficial and ſerviceable to them. This is evident from theſe words of the Patriarch Job; "If I have with-held the poor from his deſire, or have cauſed the eyes of the widow to fail; or have eaten my morſel myſelf alone, and the fatherleſs hath not eaten thereof;—if I have ſeen any periſh for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; if his loins have not bleſſed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my ſheep: if I have lifted up my hand againſt the fatherleſs, when I ſaw my help in the gate; then let mine arm fall from my ſhoulder-blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone."†—Such, Chriſtians, are the ſenſations, and ſuch the diſpoſition of the truly merciful, of whom our Lord ſpeaks, and who ſhall finally obtain mercy.

* Chap. ii. 15, 16. † Job xxxi. 16, &c.

Having

Having thus endeavoured to give you ſome diſtinct ideas of thoſe *perſons*, whom the Son of God denominates *Merciful:* and alſo of the *duties* which they fail not to put in practice :—I ſhall now, as propoſed in the SECOND place,

II. Make a few obſervations on the *happineſs*, or *bleſſedneſs*, of the truly merciful.

Were we only to conſult human reaſon, it would evidently appear, That the merciful man is really the moſt happy : For what can be more pleaſing and delightful, more noble and divine, than to do good ? What can make us more reſemble the Father of Mercies, than to be the Refuge of the diſtreſſed, the Help of the needy, the Diſpenſer of bleſſings to the poor, the fatherleſs, and the widow ?—The Heathens themſelves preferred no virtue to goodneſs. They acknowledged, that nothing was ſo noble in a great fortune as the power it gave of doing good ; and nothing ſo laudable in man, as a deſire to make the wretched happy.—Titus Veſpaſian was called " The Delight of Mankind," becauſe he would not ſuffer a day to paſs, without doing good to ſome or other of his ſubjects : and Cicero praiſed Cæſar more for pardoning Marcellus, than for all his victories.—It was the performance of generous and noble actions that

made them rank men with the gods, and eternize the memory of their beneficent princes. The ſupreme JEHOVAH delights to make himſelf known to the children of men, by *pardoning* and *giving*. With the one hand he holds out a free pardon to penitent offenders; and with the other pours down bleſſings upon his creatures. The merciful, who imitate his example, come the neareſt to his likeneſs, and may be ſtiled God's Miniſters and Vicegerents upon earth.

How very different is this godlike diſpoſition from avarice and ſelfiſhneſs, which, like death and the grave, ſwallow up all, but return nothing!—How pleaſing is that ſweetneſs which careſſes, which comforts, which pours the healing balm into the wounds of another!—And how greatly preferable is it to that rude and ſavage temper which envenoms the wounds, which inſults the miſery, and ſhocks the feelings of the indigent and oppreſſed, by denials and keen reproaches! In a word, the man who overcometh evil with good; who perceives more greatneſs of ſoul in pardoning an injury, than in revenging it; who ſtrives more to gain the love of his enemy, than to work his deſtruction;—is a glorious character! and infinitely more to be admired than that implacable

and

and revengeful temper, which rejoices to add to the miſeries of thoſe who have offended it!

Indeed, my brethren, if we fairly examine the matter, we ſhall find that the merciful are the *only* happy perſons upon earth. They are ſo from the ſweetneſs of their own diſpoſition, which is always ſerene and benevolent:—They are happy in their good name and reputation; for their name "ſhall be in everlaſting remembrance;"* it ſhall be embalmed with honour, "and the ſcent thereof ſhall be as the wine of Lebanon;" whilſt the memory of the churl ſhall rot: or, if at all remembered, ſhall be loathed and deteſted.—They are happy in the bleſſings of the poor, who daily put up a thouſand prayers in their behalf.—They are happy in having the approbation of their own conſcience; and, ſtill more ſo, in a ſenſe of God's favour and friendſhip; in the aſſurance of their ſins being pardoned, their perſons juſtified, and their eternal ſalvation ſecured. For, having the marks of God's children, they are certain of ſharing in his grace and mercy. This is the grand cauſe of their happineſs, and the true reaſon of their felicity.

Wherever he is, whatever he is doing, the merciful man is happy and bleſſed. He is a

* Pſal. cxii. 6.

ſpecial object of Divine favour, and is always under the protection of Omnipotence. His perſon, his ſubſtance, his family, his *All* is bleſſed.—Theſe beatitudes the Royal Prophet, as the meſſenger and forerunner of the Meſſiah, preached, "Bleſſed," ſaith he, "is the man that conſidereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preſerve him, and keep him alive; and he ſhall be bleſſed upon earth: And thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The Lord will ſtrengthen him upon the bed of languiſhing: thou wilt make all his bed in his ſickneſs."*—Verily, the merciful man may aſſure himſelf, That God, whoſe "eyes are upon the juſt, and whoſe ears are open to their cry," will not overlook him, nor ſhut his ears againſt the voice of his ſupplications. Indeed, it is impoſſible for God to neglect his own dear children, who deſire to imitate their heavenly Father, by doing good to all. The Lord will not be to him, as he threatened to be unto Ephraim, "A lion to tear, and to take away."† Such he may often be to the unfeeling and the unmerciful: But "he who hath diſperſed and given to the poor, his righteouſneſs endureth for ever: his horn ſhall be exalted with honour."

* Pſal. xli. 1, 2, 3. † Hoſ. v. 14.

nour."—"The meek ſhall inherit the earth:"—and "whatſoever he doeth ſhall proſper."—Nothing will ſooner engage the attention of Heaven, than our aſſiduous endeavours to relieve the diſtreſſed and ſuccour the miſerable. Prayers, accompanied with alms, will quickly find their way to the Throne of Grace, as thoſe of Cornelius did.* "Thou ſhalt call, and the Lord ſhall anſwer: thou ſhalt cry, and he ſhall ſay, Here I am."—But when?—At the time that "thou draweſt out thy ſoul to the hungry, and ſatisfieſt the afflicted ſoul: then ſhall thy light riſe in obſcurity; and thy darkneſs be as the noon day. And the Lord ſhall guide thee continually, and ſatisfy thy ſoul in drought, and make fat thy bones: And thou ſhalt be as a watered garden, and like a ſpring of water, whoſe waters fail not."†—But without farther enlarging on this part of our ſubject, I ſhall proceed to the THIRD thing propoſed, viz,

III. To uſe a few *Motives*, or *Arguments*, in order to excite you to the practice of this godlike virtue, *Mercy*.—And for this end,

1ſt. Let me urge the promiſe given us in the Text. "Bleſſed are the merciful;" Why? "For they ſhall obtain mercy."—They that

* Acts x. 4. † Iſa. lviii. 9, &c.

ſhow

ſhow mercy ſhall find mercy. Into thoſe, who pour the oil of compaſſion into others, God will pour the golden oil of ſalvation. The hand of the poor is Chriſt's treaſury; and nothing is loſt that is put into it. "Inaſmuch as ye have done it to one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me."* And no kindneſs done to him ſhall paſs unnoted, or unrewarded. "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love which ye have ſhewed toward his name, in that ye have miniſtered unto the ſaints, and do miniſter."† He will return mercy for mercy; but with an infinitely large increaſe! For a *wedge* of gold, you ſhall receive a *weight of glory*; for a *cup of cold water*, you ſhall have *rivers of pleaſures*, which ſhall flow for ever and ever!—What a noble virtue is Mercy!

"The quality of mercy is not ſtrained;
"It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,
"Upon the place beneath. It is twice bleſſed;
"It bleſſeth him that gives, and him that takes,
"It is mightieſt in the mightieſt; it becomes
"The throned monarch better than his crown:
"His ſceptre ſhews the force of temporal power,
"The attribute to awe and majeſty,
"Wherein doth ſit the dread and fear of Kings:
"But mercy is above this ſcepter'd ſway;

* Matt. xxv. 45. † Heb. v 10.

"It

" It is enthroned in the hearts of Kings;
" It is an attribute to God himſelf;
" And earthly power doth then ſhew likeſt God's
" When mercy ſeaſons juſtice. Therefore—
" ——Conſider this,
" That in the courſe of juſtice none of us
" Should ſee ſalvation. We do pray for mercy;
" And that ſame prayer ſhould teach us all to render
" The deeds of mercy."*

Think, Chriſtians, who it is that here, in the text, recommends the exerciſe of mercy to men, and who, in return, promiſes that of God.—It is no leſs than *Mercy incarnate*; *Love* itſelf!—the moſt perfect example of the one, and the meritorious cauſe of the other.—But how infinitely does that which he promiſes ſurpaſs that which he demands!—How very ſmall the proportion between God's mercy to us, and ours to our brethren of mankind!—After all that we do, or can do, with Jacob, we may ſay, " I am not worthy of the leaſt of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou haſt ſhewed unto thy ſervant."† Indeed, all our acts of beneficence, when put together, are but " as the ſmall duſt of the ballance," when compared with the love of Chriſt, which ſurpaſſeth knowledge. *Charity* and *Mercy* may be reckoned a part of the condition that God requires in ſhow-

* Shakeſpeare. † Gen. xxxii. 10.

ing

ing us mercy; and which he exacts in promiſing us glory: nevertheleſs, they are by no means the meritorious cauſe of procuring for us the Divine mercy. The reward given us is not of merit, but of promiſe; not of debt, but of grace.

And what promiſe can be more excellent, more comfortable, more deſirable than this of *Mercy*?—In what elſe does the bleſſedneſs of ſinners conſiſt? Or what do we more need than pardoning and ſaving mercy?—David well underſtood its value, when he declared thoſe, and thoſe only, the truly *bleſſed*, "whoſe tranſgreſſions are forgiven, whoſe ſins are covered."* —The ſinner has no need of juſtice, for that would be to him a conſuming fire. Mercy is now abſolutely neceſſary. Therefore, ſaith the compaſſionate Saviour, Be merciful to your brethren, and God will be merciful unto you. In return for your temporal kindneſs, you ſhall receive the bleſſings of nature and of grace; the happineſs of time and eternity; the bleſſings of earth and heaven; "the upper and the nether ſprings," with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.—But,

2dly. Let me perſuade you to be merciful from this conſideration,—That God, in the

* Pſal. xxxii. 1.

ways

ways of his Providence, generally carries himſelf towards us, as we do towards our fellow-creatures: and that by ſome means, ordinary or extraordinary, it ſhall be done to us, as we do unto others.—If we conſider this, only in the natural courſe of things, we ſhall find it almoſt impoſſible, that the man who loves and ſhows kindneſs to all, ſhould not be loved and kindly uſed himſelf.—It would, verily, be hard, not to pardon ſomething in him who is ready to pardon every one; and to have no pity on him who rejoiceth to ſhow pity, and exerciſe compaſſion, towards all, who are really objects thereof.—Sure it is, my brethren, that a Chriſtian, who has not only gained the heart of the poor, but even that of his enemies, whoſe character for benevolence is eſtabliſhed, who is eſteemed the father of the fatherleſs, and friend of the widow, the comforter of the afflicted, and the refuge of the diſtreſſed, ſhall always find friends and defenders.—Perhaps, it may pleaſe God, for good and wiſe purpoſes, to try him in the furnace of affliction, as he formerly did his ſervant Job; but, in due time, he ſhall be healed and exalted.—And were even a miracle neceſſary to accompliſh this, there is more reaſon to believe that God would work it, than that he would ſuffer the great and precious promiſes made in the Oracles

Oracles of Truth to fail.—God is a good creditor, and will not fail to recompenſe thoſe ſervants, who faithfully employ the talents committed to their care. "He that *giveth* to the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again."* "With the merciful thou wilt ſhew thyſelf merciful; with an upright man thou wilt ſhew thyſelf upright."†—The Shunamite's kindneſs to the Prophet Eliſha was rewarded with a ſon; and with the reſtoration of that ſon to life, when dead.‡—The handful of meal in a barrel, and the cruſe of oil, did not fail to the widow of Zarephath, who received an Elijah, and ſhared with him the little ſuſtenance that remained.§ Therefore, let none who practiſe charity and benevolence be afraid; for Elijah's God ſtill exiſts; and has a thouſand ways, to refill your barrel, and repleniſh your cruſe when empty; yea, to return into your boſom, an hundred fold, whatever you lay out through love to him.

3dly. Beſides that noble recompenſe of reward which *you* ſhall receive, there is another powerful conſideration to excite you to acts of Charity and Mercy; that is, the great advantage that will thence redound to *your poſterity*.

* Prov. xix. 17. † Pſal. xviii. 25. ‡ 2 Kings, chap. iv. § 1 Kings, xvii. 16.

Men

Men are frequently no leſs anxious and careful for the happineſs of their offspring than for their own happineſs. And it is a truth no leſs certain, That God often extends his temporal bleſſings to the poſterity of the juſt; and that their families frequently reap the fruit of their charity, when their bones are mouldered into duſt. —Hence it appears, That whatever is laid out in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, inſtructing the ignorant, and relieving the diſtreſſed, is, as it were, a portion laid up for your children, intruſted to God, that he may keep it for their future uſe and benefit.—David, having received ſignal marks of friendſhip from Jonathan, the ſon of Saul his inveterate enemy, ſought to manifeſt his gratitude to his offſpring. He accordingly cauſed enquiry to be made, if any of the family of his deceaſed friend yet remained; and having found Mephiboſheth, his lame ſon, he honoured him with a ſeat at his table all the days of his life.—And it ſeems that God, in like manner, ſeeketh for the poſterity of the righteous, that he may bleſs them, and do them good: For, ſays the Pſalmiſt, "I have been young, and now am old: yet have I not ſeen the righteous forſaken; nor his ſeed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his ſeed is bleſſed."* He not only leaves

* Pſal. xxxvii. 25, 26.

leaves an eſtate behind him, but alſo a bleſſing to his children, which the Almighty will not fail to hand down inviolate unto them.—But,

Laſtly, That I may not encroach too much on your time and patience, let me only call your attention from the *beginnings* and *firſt-fruits* of Mercy, and beg you to look forward to the *full accompliſhment* of the promiſe, and the *gathering in of the harveſt*; when your after-crop of glory ſhall be ſo great, that though you are ſtill reaping, you will never be able to inn the whole: and let this now perſuade you to "honour the Lord with your ſubſtance."—Let us for a little time leave the earth, on purpoſe to contemplate heaven and eternity.—It is there, it is then, that the bleſſedneſs of the merciful ſhall be complete: It is there that the compaſſionate and charitable Chriſtian ſhall receive the full recompenſe of reward: It will be then that, for a few ſmall offences, which we have forgiven in our offending brother, we ſhall receive the remiſſion of all our ſins; and for a few alms to the needy, ſhall be repaid with the riches of the celeſtial Paradiſe. For a mite, we ſhall receive a glorious crown; for a drop, a ſea; and for temporary relief, everlaſting happineſs. This he who cannot lie hath promiſed. "Give," ſays Chriſt, "and it ſhall be given unto

unto you.—Forgive, and ye ſhall be forgiven." Yes, my brethren, God has a book for recording our alms, as well as a bottle for our tears. And as ſure as he will caſt a vail over our ſins, ſo ſurely will he put a crown upon our works of faith and labours of love. In that awful day of account, when the ſecrets of all men's hearts ſhall be laid open, the merciful man ſhall be rewarded; though not *for* his works, yet *according* to his works. "I ſaw," ſays St. John, "the dead, ſmall and great, ſtand before God; and the books were opened:—and the dead were judged, out of thoſe things which were written in the books, according to their works." Then ſhall he receive this joyful ſentence of approbation, "Come ye bleſſed of my Father, &c."*—And why thus glorioufly diſtinguiſhed? The reaſons follow: "For," ſaith the Judge, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; thirſty, and ye gave me drink, &c." Then will the meek and merciful, renouncing all merit in their good works, and amazed to find what little they had done ſo graciouſly acknowledged, and ſo highly rewarded, reply, "Lord, when ſaw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirſty, &c.?"—Then "the King ſhall anſwer and ſay unto them, Verily, I ſay unto

* See Matt. xxv. 34, and following verſes.

you, Inaſmuch as ye have done it unto one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye have done it unto me." O Mercy ineffable! O Grace incomprehenſible!—Who can refrain from admiring the beneficence of the Maſter, and the happineſs of the ſervants!—Who can keep from exclaiming, "Bleſſed indeed are the merciful; ſince they ſhall obtain ſuch mercy!"

Has the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the Judge of all fleſh, really promiſed ſuch mercy to the merciful? Moſt aſſuredly.—Then, what ſtronger motive can be urged to excite us to works of charity and beneficence? None; for every argument is included in theſe words, *Ye ſhall obtain mercy*. What is it that poor condemned criminals moſt need?—Is it not mercy?—— What is it that can cover your tranſgreſſions, ſooth your troubled conſcience, deliver you from hell, and gain you admiſſion into heaven? What but Mercy?—What is it for which you ſo earneſtly importune God, with tears of repentance? Is it not Mercy?—Well, remember that this mercy is promiſed to you, if you are merciful. Therefore, my Chriſtian Friends, as you expect the mercy of God to yourſelves, it behoves you to be merciful to your brethren: merciful in all things, in the ſentiments of your heart, in the words of your mouth, and in the actions

of

of your hands:—merciful to comfort the afflicted, to pardon the offender, to inſtruct the ignorant, to relieve the oppreſſed, and to ſupply the wants of the needy.—Be unto them as a ſhadow from the heat, and as rivers of water to a thirſty ſoul. Diffuſe your bleſſings plentifully, and ſow abundantly, in the certain proſpect of a large increaſe. The way to lay up is to lay out; for, though it may, for the preſent, make your purſe lighter, it will make your crown heavier. Every other part of your eſtate is left behind; but that which is given to Chriſt's needy ones goes before you into heaven, where you will receive it with accumulated intereſt.

Before I conclude our preſent exerciſe, permit me juſt to mention a few *Rules*, neceſſary to be obſerved in ſhewing Mercy to your indigent brethren.—And, firſt,

Take heed, That whatever you do be done *cheerfully and freely*, "not grudgingly, or of neceſſity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."—"Thou ſhalt open thine hand unto thy brother:—thou ſhalt ſurely give him; and thine heart ſhall not be grieved, when thou giveſt unto him."

Next, Take care that what thou giveſt is not

the property of *another*, but thine *own*; juſtly acquired, and honeſtly kept: for whilſt we are to love mercy, we are alſo to do *juſtice*:—"I," ſaith the Lord, "love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt-offering."

Again, Let your works of mercy be done in *humility*, without oſtentation or vain-glory; for this dead fly will ſpoil the whole pot of ointment. Whilſt a good man empties his hand of his alms, he empties his heart of pride; and while he raiſeth the poor *out* of the duſt, he lays himſelf *in* the duſt.

Obſerve likewiſe, *how*, and with what *deſign*, you perform your works of Mercy.—They muſt all be done *in* Chriſt, and *for* Chriſt. Labour that your perſons and offerings may be accepted in him; for, out of him, all our alms-deeds are but the fruit of the wild olive: they are not good works, but dead works.——And they muſt be done for *his* ſake, by which our love to him is teſtified; and it is this love to Chriſt that gives our alms a ſweet-ſmelling ſavour with God. It was love for her Saviour that cauſed Mary to bring her ointments and ſweet ſpices to anoint his dead body: let the ſame principle cauſe you to bring your ointments and ſpices to anoint his living body, that

that is, his ſaints and members.—And, when you give, do it with thankfulneſs; bleſſing God that you are among the number of *Givers*, not of *Receivers*: that you have not only an eſtate, but alſo a heart to employ it to the honour of your Lord, and to the comfort of your fellow-creatures.—And,

Laſtly.—Be prudent and diſcreet in the diſtribution of your charity, both as to the *time* when, and the *objects* thereof.—As to the *time* when, the fitteſt and beſt is whilſt you are in health and proſperity. Communicate of your ſilver, and your gold to the poor, before "the ſilver cord be looſed, or the golden bowl be broken." Make your own hands your executors; and do not, like too many, keep back what you ſhould give, until you are about to die, and can keep it no longer. What is then given is not charity, but neceſſity. That only which is given in time of health and proſperity will God regard, and put into his book of accounts.

As to the fitteſt *objects* of charity, they are either thoſe who are in the greateſt diſtreſs;—or thoſe who may be the moſt ſerviceable in the world.—Give, therefore, to ſuch as ſtand in need of your aſſiſtance: Raiſe the hedge where it is loweſt; and feed the lamp that is ready to die.

But, of all charities, none are more uſeful, more laſting, and productive of happier conſequences, than thoſe for clothing and educating the children of the Poor. In theſe ſeminaries many are reared, who, in their turn, may help to "build the houſe of Iſrael;" and prove pillars both in Church and State. That this is the caſe, we know from experience; and frequently ſee it exemplified in the charitable inſtitution, for the benefit of which we are this day aſſembled.

This ſchool, in Shakeſpear's Walk, was the *firſt* of its kind, among Proteſtant Diſſenters, in London, where children are both clothed and inſtructed. It ſet a noble example; and many, to the honour of our country, have followed it. This alone ſhould entitle it to ſome particular regard.—It has been ſupported and kept up for near a century; and is now, thank Heaven, in no leſs flouriſhing a ſtate than ever: indeed more ſo, as of late years the number of boys educated therein has been conſiderably increaſed. —Let it not fall off, my friends, or decline, in your time and day.—But why ſhould I ſuppoſe ſuch a thing?—It can never fail to ſucceed, whilſt it hath ſo many pious, able, and generous ſupporters: And its utility muſt appear evident to all by the happy effects it has produced.

duced.—Many, who have been taught in this ſchool, are now valuable members in the Church of Chriſt; fill up uſeful ſtations in life, with credit and reputation; and are voluntary ſupporters of this very Inſtitution, where they received the firſt rudiments of inſtruction: without which they might have been a burthen to ſociety, a grief to their relations, and a diſgrace to their country.—What a beneficial grace is Charity!

And what act of Mercy is greater than reſcuing the moſt hopeful part of mankind, I mean the young and riſing generation, from ignorance from vice, from ruin?—What greater kindneſs can you ſhow than ſeaſoning youthful minds with the genuine principles of Religion and Morality, teaching them their duty to *God*, to their *Brethren*, and to *themſelves?* How can you poſſibly lay out a ſmall part of your ſubſtance to better advantage than in enlightening ſouls, naturally dark, with the ſaving knowledge of Chriſt, in ſetting before them the beauty of Holineſs, with the deformity of Vice; that they may be led to love the one, and abhor the other?—What more beneficial than training up children in the way that they ſhould go? than giving them an early love for virtue, making them loyal ſubjects, uſeful members of ſociety; and, if ſpared

to be parents themſelves, rendering them capable of inſtructing their offspring in neceſſary knowledge, and of ſetting a proper example before them?

Conſider, Chriſtians, That the good you are doing thoſe young ones now before you, is not confined to themſelves alone, but extendeth to generations yet unborn, who may feel the happy effects of your generoſity. What a great kindneſs to feed the hungry, and clothe the naked! —But how much greater to reſcue the *Infant Poor* from the ſnares and dangers to which they are particularly expoſed, either from the ſinful example too often ſet before them by ignorant, by irreligious parents, or others with whom they are brought up; or, through a want of that neceſſary education, which many ſober and induſtrious parents wiſh to give their children, but cannot!—What pleaſure muſt it now give, to think that you are the means, under God, of making theſe young ones fit for living in the world with decency and credit! And, what is of ſtill higher importance, of making them wiſe unto ſalvation; and, by the religious inſtruction you give them, preparing them for a more bliſsful and happy ſtate in the world to come!—— May your labours of love be always attended with the deſired ſucceſs!

Here,

Here, my Friends, I cannot help mentioning, and that with the greateſt pleaſure and ſatisfaction, the large, the uſeful addition made to this Charitable Inſtitution, ſince the laſt time we met together on this Anniverſary: I mean THE FEMALE-SCHOOL lately planned, and carried into execution, by a few pious, reſpectable and charitable *Ladies*; whoſe compaſſionate hearts felt for the neglect, the miſeries, the hardſhips, and, more eſpecially, for the temptations to which the young of their ſex are particularly expoſed; whilſt they are leſs able to reſiſt them.——To inſtil into their youthful minds virtuous principles,—to accuſtom them to habits of induſtry,—to make them uſeful in their ſphere of life,—to inſtruct them in the ſaving knowledge of the Goſpel of Chriſt, by which that grace is imparted, which fortifies the ſoul againſt the temptations and inſidious arts of the wicked, which enables to reſiſt the Devil, the World, and the Fleſh, which keeps unſpotted from the pollutions of vice, and preſerves, through faith, unto eternal ſalvation,—were the grand and leading deſigns which thoſe worthy Ladies had chiefly in view. Providence, that approves of ſuch laudable ſchemes, has ſmiled on their pious undertaking.—Many more, both virtuous matrons, and, pleaſing to relate, young,

and

and amiable virgins, inſtead of being carried away, like too many of their age and ſex, by the follies and diſſipations of the times, have cordially joined with the firſt Founders of this *Female* Charity, to encourage and ſupport it.—Their ſucceſs has been wonderful:—and thoſe little girls, now in your preſence, ſo decently apparelled, ſo neat, and ſo clean, are a convincing proof of their zeal for the cauſe of religion and virtue; and a witneſs how far God has ſeconded and proſpered their labours of love.*

As this School for the Boys was the firſt of its kind in London, ſo is that, of which I now ſpeak, the firſt of its kind for female children, being *totally* under the management and direction of *Ladies*.—May their noble example be followed by many.—Under their maternal auſpices, may this infant Charity grow and increaſe.—May its permanency be coeval with time, or as laſting as ſuch a valuable inſtitution can be uſeful to mankind.——May numbers be trained up therein to be ornaments to Religion, a comfort to their parents, a bleſſing to the

* Twenty Girls were taken into the *Female-School* at its firſt opening; and, in leſs than twelve months, ten more were admitted:—All of whom are neatly and *liberally* clothed, inſtructed, and attended to, by thoſe excellent Ladies, with uncommon, yea with maternal care.

world,

world, and an honour to their kind Patroneſſes. —And when the worthy Founders, and preſent Supporters, of this Female-School, ſhall ſleep with their Fathers, and are gone to receive the rewards promiſed to the Merciful, may their Names be had in everlaſting remembrance, and the fair Pattern, they have ſet, be imitated and followed up by many, even to the lateſt generations:———And my ages to come call them BLESSED.

Here alſo it may be neceſſary to obſerve, That thoſe two Schools, namely, that of the *Boys*, and that of the *Girls*, are totally unconnected, in regard to their finances, having perfectly diſtinct intereſts; and under a ſeparate management.—No part of what may be this day collected goes to the Female-School: nor does any ſhare of the Ladies ſubſcriptions come to that of the Boys.——I hope, in God, that each will be able to keep up, and alſo to increaſe, the number of their ſcholars; and make their laudable Inſtitutions more extenſive.

But as this cannot be done without the aid of ſuch as are able, and willing to perform acts of Mercy, and ſhow kindneſs to the helpleſs and indigent, let me now beg your charitable aſſiſtance, and the continuance of your ſupport, to this valuable Charity, in behalf of which I now plead.

plead.—As you are Chriſtians in name, be ſuch in effect:—For the love of Jeſus, "who, although he was rich, for your ſakes became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich;" be not ſparing, or niggardly, to thoſe for whom he thus humbled himſelf. Chriſt, if I may ſo ſpeak, conceals himſelf in his poor friends, and thus ſpeaketh unto you, "Whatſoever ye do unto even the leaſt of theſe, I eſteem it as done for myſelf."—For the love ye bear to the Goſpel, which is honoured and rendered amiable to them that are without, by your holy affection towards the Brethren, preſent an offering to-day of a ſweet ſavour unto God.—For the love you have to your fellow-creatures, partakers of the ſame nature, who, in return, will give you their prayers and bleſſings, which, mounting up to Heaven, ſhall again fall on your heads in ſhowers of Grace, be merciful, be liberal.—Finally, for the ſake of your dear children, whom God will bleſs, becauſe of your kindneſs to his children; yea, for your own ſakes, who ſhall meet with a full and ample reward, "give to him that aſketh; and from him that would borrow of thee, turn thou not away." You that are rich, give of your abundance; you that are leſs ſo, withhold not your mite; and you that have nothing

elſe

elſe to beſtow, give your prayers and ſincere wiſhes for a bleſſing on the cauſe in which we are engaged.—Happy they who ſow in ſeaſon; for they ſhall reap a large increaſe!—Happy they who offer equally to God and their own ſouls! For, having in their ſeaſon, produced the fair fruits of Mercy and compaſſion, they ſhall afterwards be tranſplanted into the celeſtial paradiſe, where they ſhall grow and flouriſh through eternity.

Seeing we have theſe glorious proſpects before us, "let us *now*, as we have opportunity, do good unto all men; eſpecially unto thoſe that are of the Houſhold of Faith;" remembering that our Lord hath ſaid, "Bleſſed are the merciful: for they ſhall obtain Mercy."—Amen.

SERMON

SERMON IX.

THE UPRIGHT MAN'S CHARACTER, AND HAPPY END.

PSALM XXXVII. 37.

MARK THE PERFECT MAN, AND BEHOLD THE UPRIGHT: FOR THE END OF THAT MAN IS PEACE.

NOTHING is more likely to excite men to the practice of what is laudable and excellent, than a good example. We are pleaſed to look on a fair and beautiful picture; and take delight in contemplating the portrait of a perſon endowed with extraordinary graces.—The perſon I ſhall now exhibit to your view is one of the moſt amiable and engaging; and the character I ſhall attempt to draw, though the moſt ſimple, is the faireſt and pureſt, the moſt worthy of our attention, and the moſt deſerving of our imitation: it is that of an *upright man*, whom God himſelf honours with the epithet of *perfect*.—Indeed, nothing is more deſired by God than "truth in the inward parts;" and with nothing

nothing is he more delighted than with ſincerity. "My ſon," ſays he, "give me thine heart."—"Walk before me, and be thou perfect," or ſincere.—Sincerity is the higheſt degree of perfection to which we can attain in this mortal ſtate; and, where that is wanting, no ſervice, however ſplendid, can be acceptable in the ſight of Heaven. It is that which adorns Religion, which gives it importance, and renders it truly ſavoury.

This is a ſubject of the greateſt conſequence, and well deſerving of our moſt ſerious attention: to gain which you have God himſelf calling upon you to obſerve, to take notice, and "mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."

In further handling this ſubject, I ſhall,—FIRST, Make an obſervation or two on theſe words, "*Perfect and Upright*."—SECONDLY, Endeavour to deſcribe who this *upright man* is; ſo that you may know him, if, perchance, you ſhould meet with him.—And, THIRDLY, Conſider his bleſſed and happy *end*;—"the end of that man is peace."

And may the good Spirit of the Lord excite, and enable us to come, as near as poſſible, to this reſpectable Character;—to live the life of the Righteous, that we may die his death, and have our latter end like his.

Laſtly,

I. I am to make an Obſervation, or two, on theſe words, *perfect and upright*.—Here ſome may object to the word *perfect*, and aſſert that there is no ſuch thing as a perfect character on earth; for, who can ſay, "I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my ſin?"——— Doubtleſs, my brethren, no man liveth and ſinneth not: and I am far from thinking, with the Catharists, and ſome Chriſtians in our days, that any of Chriſt's followers, even the moſt faithful, can arrive at perfect purity in this life; or be free of ſin before death. It is rather wonderful that any ſhould entertain ſuch an opinion; for were there nothing in the ſacred Oracles to confute it, our own daily experience would. The moſt advanced ſaint on earth will find the motions and ebullitions of ſin working within him. Who ever attained to a higher degree of perfection than the Apoſtle Paul? And yet, we find him complaining grievouſly of a law in his members, warring againſt the law of his mind; and crying out vehemently againſt a "body of death."* Grace, in this life, is like gold mixed with alloy; which, though not pure, is ſtill gold: ſo, in a ſimilar ſenſe, although a Chriſtian cannot be perfect, in the

* Rom. vii. 24.

literal meaning of the word, yet in its *evangelical* meaning he certainly may.—For,

1ſt. A real Believer may be ſaid to be *perfect*, in regard to his having a perfection of parts, though not in degree.—There is no part of him into which grace is not infuſed, and on which it does not ſhine. Though he is ſanctified only *in* part, it is in *every* part: hence grace in him is called "The new man, which after God is created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs."* Believers are ſaid to be *complete* in Chriſt; and transformed, by the renewing of their mind, into his divine likeneſs. In this ſenſe they may be ſaid to be *perfect*.

2dly. A Child of God may be ſaid to be *perfect*, in reſpect to the *end* which he has in view, and the *point* at which he aims.—Though he cannot reach real perfection, he aſpires after it; and ſtrives, with all his might, to come as near to it as poſſible. "He that is begotten of God, —that is born of water, and of the Spirit, doth not commit ſin; for his ſeed remaineth in him: —and he cannot ſin; becauſe he is born of God." Thus, though not altogether free from ſin, he may be ſaid to be *perfect*; for his will is againſt it; he hates it, and has doomed it to deſtruction.

* Eph. iv. 24.

3dly.

3dly. The ſaints of God are ſaid to be *perfect*, in regard to *others*.—Gold, though mixed with ore, is perfect, in compariſon to lead, or tin: and a diſciple of Chriſt, albeit he is encompaſſed with many failings and infirmities, is perfect, in reſpect to a profligate and impious ſon of Belial. Thus Noah, though far from being ſinleſs, was nevertheleſs, when compared with the profane world around him, "a juſt man, and perfect in his generations."

4thly. Believers may be dignified with the epithet of *perfect*, in that they have the perfect righteouſneſs of Chriſt imputed unto them.—It is this which makes them complete. Nor is it wonderful, when they ſtand before the Judge of all fleſh, arrayed with the robes of their Redeemer's righteouſneſs, and waſhed in their Saviour's blood, that he ſhould pronounce them *perfect*: for ſuch as have "the righteouſneſs of God" made over to them *muſt* be perfect.—And let me add,

5thly. That God calls the righteous man *perfect*, becauſe he intends finally to make him ſo.—In this life our ſouls, like the rude draught of a picture juſt begun, have only ſome traits, and ſome imperfect lineaments of grace drawn upon them; nevertheleſs, God pronounces us perfect, becauſe he is reſolved to complete the portrait

trait of the new man, to draw us in full beauty, and lay upon us the radiant colours of his glory. Thus Chriſt calls his Church his "Dove," his "Undefiled," or, as it may be rendered, his *Perfect*, notwithſtanding ſhe had her defects and blemiſhes. He had choſen her to perfection, and he intended to make her perfect.—Thus Believers are perfect, in that they ſhall as certainly be made ſo, as if they already were.

As to the meaning of the word *Uprightneſs*, it ſignifies plainneſs, artleſſneſs, honeſty, and integrity.—Hence it follows, that an upright man is open and candid: he ſpeaks the truth in his heart, without colluſion, deception, or double-dealing: his words, his thoughts are in uniſon; and in his ſpirit there is no guile.

An *upright man* is one that is tried and approved, eſpecially of God who diſcerns the moſt ſecret intentions of the human heart, who cannot be deceived, and who will not fail to approve of that man who is ſincere in ſpirit, and upright in all his ways.—But I proceed, as propoſed in the SECOND place,

II. To deſcribe this *upright man* more particularly; ſo that you may not fail to know him, if perchance you ſhould happen to meet with him.—And,

1ſt. The

1ſt. The *upright man* is one whoſe heart is ſtill *for* God, and ſtill *with* God; and, conſequently, all the other powers, affections, and deſires of his ſoul are: For as the heart is the ſeat of all the paſſions and affections, ſo it carries them along with it wherever it goes.—It was cuſtomary with the high-prieſt, when he cut up the beaſt for ſacrifice, firſt to inſpect the heart: if it was ſound, the ſacrifice was accepted; but, if it had any blemiſh, it was rejected.—We frequently find God complaining of his ancient people of Iſrael, in that, while they honoured him with their lips, their hearts were far from him.—It was not their coſtly offerings which he valued, but the heart only that he regarded: without this, their moſt precious gifts were an abomination in his ſight.—In Religion the heart is every thing: and the upright man, having but one heart, keeps it ſolely and entirely for his God.

2dly. The *upright man* is one who acts from a right *principle*, and to a right *end*.—The principle by which he conducts himſelf is "*faith* working by *love*." In this he lives; in this all his acts of piety and devotion are performed. He reads and hears the word in faith, which makes it effectual to his ſalvation.—He prays in faith, which gives his prayers all their force

and energy; for, without this qualification, they would be altogether ineffectual, and could never prevail at "the throne of Grace."—— While hypocrites ſerve God, merely from a dread of puniſhment, the upright Chriſtian acts purely from love. He finds no conſtraint but the love of Chriſt. This, in place of being a hardſhip upon him, makes all his duties ſweet and pleaſant; and cauſes his Maſter's yoke to ſit light and eaſy. Love is the ſpring which ſets all the wheels of obedience a going; and prevents us from thinking the divine commandments grievous. It is that which perfumes, and gives a delightful fragrance to all our ſervices.

Nor does the upright man act from a right *principle* only, but alſo to a right *end*.—Selfiſh motives, and intereſted views, have no hand in directing his operations. He has always one grand object before him, and one particular point in view; that is, the *glory* of God, with the *intereſt* of the Saviour's kingdom. Before he ſets about this or the other work, he conſults with himſelf, whether it will have a tendency to advance the one, and promote the other; or whether it may poſſibly have a contrary effect. Yea, ſo dear is the honour of his divine Maſter to him, that were crowns and kingdoms, nay,

life

life itſelf, laid in the ballance againſt it, his Lord's glory would outweigh them all! No perſuaſions nor intreaties, no threats nor perſecutions, would prevent him from doing his duty. His only fear is the diſpleaſure of his God; and his chief deſire is to obtain his approbation.

Very different from this is the *end* of the hypocrite, who is ſolely directed by ſelf-intereſt. When Religion profits, he profeſſes it; but when no emolument can be thereby obtained, he throws off the profeſſion. It is the *gain* of godlineſs, not the *power* of godlineſs, that he ſeeks after.—It is the *gold* of the altar, not the *fire* of the altar, that he adores. It is the *loaves* and the *fiſhes*, not the *miracles*, that draw him to Chriſt.—Hypocrites cry up Religion, as Demetrius did Diana of the Epheſians, not ſo much for her *Temple*, as for her *ſilver ſhrines*. They make uſe of Religion, as fiſhermen do of their nets, to catch wealth and preferment. They ſacrifice to God and Mammon: and, while they are ſerving Heaven, they are ſeeking themſelves; and doing more to ſave their credit than their ſouls.—When they pray, it is to be ſeen of men; when they give alms, they blow a trumpet, an emblem of their own hollow hearts,

that they may have praiſe of men; and they affect ſelf-denial, in order to gratify their pride.

3dly. Whilſt the *upright man* acts by the nobleſt principles, and to the beſt ends, he alſo works by the ſureſt *rules*.—He does not go by the opinion of others, who are fallible and ready to miſtake; neither by the cuſtoms of the place, nor the forms of his anceſtors, many of whom have walked in darkneſs; and, through blind zeal, have ſtumbled, have fallen into the groſſeſt abſurdities, and the moſt pernicious errors; but he makes the unerring Oracles of Truth his guide, and the judge of all his actions.—He goes "to the Law, and to the Teſtimony;" to the Old, and the New Teſtaments, which he conſiders as the dictates of infinite wiſdom, and the infallible rule whereby he is to regulate all the actions of his life. Like Zacharias and Elizabeth, he walks, "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord." And though he falls ſhort in every duty, he makes a conſcience of performing every duty, whether of a publick, or of a private nature. He cheerfully endeavours to do good; and carefully avoids to give offence; walking ſoberly, in acts of temperance; honeſtly, in acts of juſtice; and godly, in acts of piety; that he may thereby adorn his Chriſtian vocation. He is not, like the hypocrite,

crite, zealous for ſome duties, but careleſs about others. He pays an equal reſpect to both tables of the law, knowing them to be of equal authority: and, like another Caleb, he "follows God fully," in the ways of his commandments; not yielding to any thing below his dignity, or againſt the dictates of his conſcience. The upright man will not veer about with every breath of popular applauſe; nor will he dare to palliate iniquity, nor flatter the ſinner, however exalted in ſtation.—He would rather that men ſhould accuſe him of imprudence, than that God ſhould accuſe him of unfaithfulneſs: and therefore, no intereſt is able to divert him from the road of duty.

4thly. An *upright man* will be *warm* and *zealous* in the cauſe of God and Religion.—He will rejoice, when the Church of Chriſt is exalted; and grieve when ſhe is in trouble and affliction.—Zeal is a mixed affection, that is made up of love and reſentment. Holy zeal is a fire from heaven, which cauſes the ſpirits and paſſions to boil up and run over. Bleſſed be its anger, for it is ſinleſs; and its wrath, for it is againſt iniquity. This fire of holy zeal burned in the breaſt of St. Paul, when he beheld the idolatry of the Athenians *.—Moſes, the meek,

* Acts xvii. 16.

was

was filled with the ſame ſacred indignation, when he ſaw the Iſraelites worſhipping, and dancing round the golden image of a calf: His "anger waxed hot, he caſt the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.—And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and made the children of Iſrael drink of it."*—Like them, the upright Chriſtian will always reſent an injury done to Religion, and an affront put upon his divine Maſter, with more indignation than he would any diſgrace that can be put upon himſelf.——A ſon who poſſeſſes true filial affection, will not bear to hear his father reproached and vilified. And, if we are the faithful ſervants of Chriſt, we will not ſilently ſuffer his divinity to be depreciated by Arians, and denied by Socinians: Nor will we hear his ſacred Ordinances ridiculed by unprincipled libertines, without ſhowing an indignant ſpirit, and manifeſting a proper fervency of zeal. Were we always to keep ſilence, and never to open our mouth in vindication of him who opened his ſide, that blood might flow out for our ſalvation, we certainly could not be reckoned among his loyal ſubjects; but rather among thoſe who are rebels againſt him, and traitors to his Crown.

But

* Exod. xxxii. 19, 20.

But if, after all that the upright man has done to recommend, to ſupport, and defend Religion, he ſtill finds it languiſhing, and on the decline, then his ſpirit grieves, and his ſoul is troubled at the affliction of the Church. Poſſeſſed of the ſtrongeſt ſympathy and fellow-feeling, he lays to heart the miſeries of Zion. However well it may go with his worldly concerns, he no ſooner perceives Religion loſing ground, and infidelity increaſing, than he is greatly afflicted. He counts the Church's loſs his own: he weeps in Zion's tears, and bleeds in her wounds.—The weeping Prophet of old, though in perfect ſafety, and furniſhed with every thing neceſſary and comfortable, by the King's command, moſt ſenſibly felt for the ſore oppreſſion of Iſrael; ſo the upright man feels for the miſeries of God's people: and the more perfect he is, the more ſenſibly will he feel another's woe.——Saints are called "lively ſtones,"* of which the ſpiritual houſe is built; and if there be any breach in the building, it touches them moſt keenly.—To ſee the Spouſe of Chriſt ſmitten, and him, through her, muſt greatly affect the heart of his friends: and when "the apple of his eye" weeps, thoſe who love her will let fall the ſympathizing tear.—But ah,

* 1 Pet. ii. 5.

my

my brethren, how ſmall the number of thoſe upright ſaints!—May not the charge which the prophet Amos brought againſt Iſrael, in ancient times, be now brought againſt too many of the profeſſing followers of the humble and compaſſionate Jeſus, "that lie upon beds of ivory, and ſtretch themſelves upon their couches; and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midſt of the ſtall; that chant to the ſound of the viol, and invent to themſelves inſtruments of muſick, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themſelves with the chief ointments:—but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joſeph."*

5thly. Another part of the *upright man*'s character is, That he will not allow himſelf the gratification of any known ſin, however ſweet to his carnal appetite, or grateful to his natural ſenſes; but will, like another Joſeph, repel the temptation, ſaying, "How can I do this great wickedneſs, and ſin againſt God?"†

There is in every man's heart ſome particular ſin that predominates, and which is often as dear to him as a right hand, or a right eye.—This favourite ſin is Satan's fort, from which he makes the moſt violent aſſaults upon "the new man," in order to ſecure the poſſeſſion of

* Amos vi. 4, &c. † Gen. xxxix, 9.

the

the whole citadel: And whilſt he can uſe this at his pleaſure, he aſks no more.——Now, the upright Chriſtian is particularly on his guard againſt this conſtitutional ſin; and, in place of indulging himſelf therein, he uſes every mean to get it mortified and deſtroyed. A renewed ſoul is not only angry with ſin, but he abhors it; and when it would, ſerpent-like, inſinuate itſelf into his boſom, he hates it the more; and his reſentment rages the more fiercely againſt it.—No Babyloniſh garment, no Naboth's vineyard, no golden apple will tempt him to ſtoop beneath his dignity, or cauſe him to turn aſide from the ſtraight path of truth and holineſs.

6thly. The *perfect man* is alſo *liberal* and *communicative*; and rejoices in opportunities of doing good.—He is "rich in good works, ready to diſtribute, and willing to communicate," when his Lord's glory, and the happineſs of his fellow-creatures, require it. He doth not, with hypocritical profeſſors, of whom we have but too many amongſt us, wiſh to have a cheap Goſpel, and to offer to God that which coſts him nothing; nor to hazard the loſs of his ſoul by ſaving a little of his money: but he cheerfully, and with a liberal heart, contributes to the maintenance of God's worſhip and ſervice. He will not ſuffer the ſacred fire of the altar to die

die away for want of a little fuel; nor the Miniſters of Chriſt to drag out a life of indigence and contempt, whilſt he has it in his power to make them comfortable and reſpected.

Nor is the *upright man* liberal only in ſupporting the worſhip and ſervice of God, but, knowing that the ſum of Chriſtian diſcipline conſiſts in mercy, he is alſo kind and bountiful to all Chriſt's poor and needy friends. The poor man's hand is God's treaſury, into which he is always caſting ſomething. "He hath diſperſed, he hath given to the poor; his righteouſneſs endureth for ever; his horn ſhall be exalted with honour."—He is a publick bleſſing to the place in which he lives; for, like the univerſal Parent of all, who "ſendeth the ſprings into the vallies," he diffuſes his goodneſs all around him; and makes his refreſhing ſhowers of charity to fall on the parched ſoil of poverty and indigence.

How very different are thoſe ſelf-intereſted men who "all ſeek their own," but care not how it goes with the welfare of others!—There are ſome perſons in the world perfectly callous, and void of feeling for the diſtreſſes of their afflicted brethren; from whom it would be as difficult to draw a drop of charity, as to extract oil from the flinty rock.—It has often been remarked,

marked, That the richeſt mines are found in the barrenneſt ground: and it too frequently happens, that thoſe who have the greateſt ſhare of worldly riches, have the moſt ſteril hearts; and are moſt barren in good works. But can that man, "who hath this world's goods, and ſeeth his brother have need, and ſhutteth up his bowels of compaſſion from him," truly ſay, That he loves God? that he is upright in heart, and acts up to the character of a diſciple of Chriſt, who diveſted himſelf of all his greatneſs and glory; and "for our ſakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich?"

7thly. The *upright man* is careful to order his life and converſation according to the Goſpel of Chriſt, and to make daily progreſs in holineſs.—By a life of godlineſs, he puts a crown of honour upon Religion; and greatly adorns his holy profeſſion. Though the foundation of ſincerity is in the heart, it cannot be there concealed; for its beautiful frontiſpiece will appear in the outward man. He knows the utility of a good example, and the happy influence it may have in the world; therefore he endeavours to make his "light ſo ſhine before men, that they may ſee his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven."—But, not ſatisfied with any attainments he may have already made in the

the divine life, he ſtill aims at higher degrees of holineſs; he goes from ſtrength to ſtrength, and "follows on to know the Lord."—Though he is ſenſible that he cannot reach abſolute perfection, he aſpires after it; and ſeeks to arrive at "the meaſure of the ſtature of the fulneſs of Chriſt." Thus "the righteous ſhall hold on his way; and he that hath clean hands ſhall be ſtronger and ſtronger."

Nor is it only at certain times that the upright man grows in grace, and makes progreſs in his way heaven-ward, but always.—With Job, he thus reſolves, "My righteouſneſs I hold faſt, and will not let it go; my heart ſhall not reproach me, ſo long as I live."* His zeal for God, like the fire in the Temple of Veſta, keeps always burning: and whatever elſe he may loſe, he ſtill holds faſt his integrity.—Like the three children, whom neither Nebuchadnezzar's muſick could charm, nor his fiery furnace fright from their religion, he ſtands invincible. If called to ſuffer for the cauſe of Chriſt, with St. Paul, he glories in his ſufferings: and, though death ſhould be in his way, he dreads not; but ſpurs on to the end of the race; and preſſes forward until he reaches the goal, and receives the prize of eternal life.

* Chap. xxvii. 6.

Laſtly,

Laſtly, As the *upright man* is careful to ſet a noble example of piety and rectitude in his *own* life and converſation, ſo he does every thing in his power to recommend it to *others*.—He ſets Religion forth in her native charms; that the world may ſee, admire and love her. He labours to make crooked things ſtraight, to bring ſinners to God, and a ſpiritual ſeed to Chriſt. He is eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; making them ſee the error of their ways, and carrying them on in the road that leads to the celeſtial country.—He remembers his Lord's advice to Peter, "When thou art converted, ſtrengthen thy brethren;"* and he acts according to it. He is to his brother in the place of God, confirming his faith, increaſing his knowledge, ſtrengthening his graces, inflaming his love, enlivening his hope, and encouraging him to perſevere in his Chriſtian courſe, in ſpite of every trial and difficulty with which he may be called to encounter, that he may finally obtain the end of his calling, even the ſalvation of his ſoul.

Thus have I endeavoured to ſet the *perfect* and the *upright man* before you, and to draw a character well worth your beholding and marking. Would to God that you were enamoured

* Luke xxii. 32.

with the portrait; and that you would do all you poſſibly can to reſemble it!—You have the ſtrongeſt motives imaginable for ſo doing;—eſpecially the bleſſed and happy *end* he makes: "for the end of that man is peace."—This we propoſed to conſider as the THIRD and LAST part of our Diſcourſe.

III. "Better," ſays the wiſe man, "is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof,"*—True is the Sage's obſervation with regard to the righteous. "Many are the afflictions of the juſt: but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."—Frequently it happens that the laſt part of the upright man's life is more comfortable, more calm and ſerene than the firſt. The bleſſed Jeſus has advertiſed his followers, That in the world they ſhall have tribulation; but in him they ſhall have peace.† God's people have often a boiſterous and tempeſtuous ſea to ſail acroſs, before they reach the haven of eternal reſt: but when arrived at the deſired port, they are refreſhed and comforted. From ſome of them the dark clouds of adverſity intercept the ſun-ſhine of proſperity for a greater length of time, than from others. The ſtorm continues longer, and rages with greater violence upon

* Eccleſ. vii. 8. † Jo. xvi. 33.

ſome

ſome than others: but, when it is blown over, they are in quietneſs. Or, ſhould it even continue to the laſt day of life, yet that day may be comfortable to the righteous, and his ſun may ſet in bright ſerenity: yea, although it ſhould ſet under a cloud, his future ſtate ſhall be reſt, and peace, and aſſurance for ever. "He ſhall enter into peace, they ſhall reſt in their beds, each one walking in his uprightneſs."* Being perfect while he lived, he is happy when he dies. His reward is moſt glorious and permanent; for the word *peace* comprehends in it all that the heart can deſire; all that can make the ſoul truly bleſſed. So peaceful, ſo pleaſant is the end of the upright, that Balaam vehemently deſired it, ſaying, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my laſt end be like his."†—But, to be ſomewhat more particular;

1ſt. The *end of the upright man is peace*, in that he takes his leave of life, and makes his exit from the ſtage of time, in full reconciliation with God.—He ſhuts his eyes upon the world, under the ſmiles of his Creator's countenance, the light whereof rejoiceth his ſpirits: And when his God is at peace with him, all things likewiſe are ſo.—How ſweet the voice of Jeſus, his glorious Immanuel, thus calling

* Iſa. lvii. 2. † Num. xxiii. 10.

him to himſelf, ſaying, "Come, my ſon, thou bleſſed of my Father;—be of good cheer; thy ſins are forgiven thee."—I have nothing to lay to thy charge: thy heart has been ſincere in my ſervice: and, although thou haſt often failed and come ſhort, I will conſider thee as perfect: —And "as thou haſt been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things."—Come, my ſon, my faithful ſervant, and enter into thy Father's, thy Maſter's joy! —O, my brethren, how calm and tranquil, how ſweet and enviable the ſtate of a dying ſaint, who breathes out his ſpirit, embracing Chriſt, and kiſſing the promiſes.—O Chriſtians, who would not deſire to reſign his ſoul in the arms of his dear Redeemer, and part with life in the charms of ſo divine a death?—Verily, death to the Believer is gain!

2dly. The *upright man* is not only at peace with God, but alſo with *himſelf*. He has within him "the teſtimony of a good conſcience, that in ſimplicity and godly ſincerity, not with fleſhly wiſdom, but by the grace of God, he hath had his converſion in the world."—This is to him a ſource of unſpeakable joy. He finds that he has the witneſs in himſelf, even the Spirit of Truth, bearing witneſs with his ſpirit that he is a child of God.—Without contro-

verſy,

verſy, that man's end muſt be peace, who has an applauding God, and an approving conſcience. He is in Paradiſe before he leaves the world; and ere his ſpirit forſakes its clay-built tabernacle, he has a foretaſte of heaven. He, who experiences this happineſs, dies in peace, and flies to the celeſtial manſions, like Noah's dove to the ark, with the olive branch in his mouth. There his felicity ſhall be complete, his peace ſhall never be diſturbed, and his joy no man taketh away.

3dly. Beſides being at peace with God and his own conſcience, the *upright man* is at peace with *Angels* above, and *Saints* below.—The heavenly hoſts rejoice to ſee him walking in the ways of the Lord. They have a pleaſure in guarding and watching over him: they are ever ready to defend him from his foes: to protect him from the ſnares and temptations of his enemies; and finally to carry him ſafe into the manſions of glory.—As to the *Saints* on earth, they love him, they highly eſteem him, and keep with him "the unity of the ſpirit in the bond of peace:" They venerate his character; they ſpeak of him with affection and pleaſure. Having ſerved his day and generation, and taken leave of their company and ſociety here below, they embalm his memory, and erect monu-

ments of honour to him in their hearts. "The righteous ſhall be in everlaſting remembrance;" his renown ſhall not periſh; and the ſavour of his name ſhall be ſweet.—And I may add,

4thly. His *end is peace* to his *Friends* and *Relatives*, who, although they carry him to the grave amidſt ſhowers of tears, are comforted by the ſoothing and pleaſing hope of another meeting, more joyful than the parting was ſorrowful. They grieve not for him as thoſe who have no hope; knowing that "bleſſed are the dead who die in the Lord;" who reſt from their labours, and ſleep ſweetly in Jeſus; and who, at the conſummation of all things, ſhall awake to life and glory everlaſting.

From what has been ſaid concerning the happineſs and *peaceful end* of the *perfect* and *upright man*, we may infer the wretched and miſerable end of the *wicked* and *ungodly*.—"The tranſgreſſors ſhall be deſtroyed together; the end of the wicked ſhall be cut off."* At the cloſe of life their happineſs terminates; that day their thoughts periſh; all their imaginary bliſs vaniſhes, as in a moment; and they die in ſhame, in horror and deſpair.—The ungodly man may live in a calm, but he dies in a ſtorm.—"Terrors, take hold on him as waters; a tempeſt

* Pſal. xxxvii. 38.

ſtealeth

ſtealeth him away in the night. The eaſt wind carrieth him away, and he departeth; and as a ſtorm hurleth him out of his place: For God ſhall caſt upon him and not ſpare."* But ſhould the proſperity of the wicked be ever ſo great, though he ſhould ſpread forth his branches like a green bay tree, and his roots as Lebanon;—though he ſhould enjoy all the honours, the riches and pleaſures that the world can poſſibly give, yet, moſt certainly, "it ſhall be bitterneſs in the latter end."†

Doubtleſs, we may ſee the hypocrite and the ungodly man take his departure from this world in as much ſeeming compoſure and ſerenity as the perfect and the upright: But this is no argument againſt the infelicity of his latter end. If he apparently has peace in his death, it is not owing to the knowledge of his future happineſs, but to a woful ignorance of his ſituation.—Haman went, with a glad heart, and a cheerful countenance, to the banquet of wine which queen Eſther had prepared; but little did he imagine how dreadfully the feaſt would terminate. So, the thoughtleſs ſinner goes on joyfully in the way that leadeth to deſtruction, indifferent about, and unmindful of the dreadful iſſue.

* Job xxvii. 20, &c. † 2 Sam. ii. 26.

Beſides, this falſe peace, in a wicked man, may be frequently owing to his being in a ſleep of fatal ſecurity, in a lethargy, which has lulled the lion, conſcience, to ſleep alſo, ſo that his repoſe is not diſturbed, nor his pleaſing reveries interrupted.—But, when he awakes, O how terribly will he roar againſt the ſinner; and how dreadful will the alarm be!

The peace, which a hypocrite ſeems to have at his latter end, may alſo ariſe from *preſumption*, from a vain and ungrounded hope that all is well with him.—But this peace is widely different from that which a dying Chriſtian experiences.—A wicked man may fancy himſelf in a very comfortable ſituation; and imagine that all things, relating to his eternal felicity, are ſafely and ſecurely ſettled, when it is quite the reverſe. His peace is a deluſion; and will end in the ſoreſt diſappointment. "While the ſtrong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace:" And while Satan can keep the ſinner's conſcience ſeared, and locked up, he is at eaſe, and fears nothing. But God, in general, lets conſcience looſe before death, and drives the ſinner out of his paradiſe; he ſweeps away his refuge of lies, before he removes him from the world; and cuts off his hope, before he cuts off his life.—Thus it is evident, that thoſe who

live without God and Chriſt in the world, muſt die without peace; and their latter end be ſorrow and anguiſh, remorſe and endleſs deſpair.

Reflect, my brethren, with ſerioufneſs and attention on what has been ſaid: ſtudy well the character ſet before you; and earneſtly endeavour, in divine ſtrength, to come up to the pattern; "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace."—Therefore, "be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and ſhout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."—Amen.

SERMON

SERMON X.

SLEEPING SINNERS CALLED TO AWAKE.

EPHES. V. 14.

AWAKE THOU THAT SLEEPEST, AND ARISE FROM THE DEAD, AND CHRIST SHALL GIVE THEE LIGHT.

VARIOUS are the ways and means which God, in his providence and grace, makes uſe of to call men from the error of their ways to the paths of holineſs and rectitude.—— Sometimes, arrayed with the terrors of awful majeſty, he rouſes unthinking ſinners, by the thunder of his power, to a ſenſe of their danger.—Sometimes, in the whirlwinds of adverſity, and in the rude ſtorms of affliction, he calls forth the dormant powers of their ſouls, when huſhed to ſleep in fatal ſecurity; and, by toſſing them on trouble's tempeſtuous ſea, brings them out of their torpid ſtate.—Oftentimes alſo, like a tender-hearted parent, he lifts up the rod, and threatens them for their folly; but ſpares to lay it on. His heart is filled with pity, his bowels

bowels of compaſſion are moved in behalf of his handy-work, and, in ſome meaſure, he feels the puniſhment he inflicts.—But, for the moſt part, God addreſſes the ſons of men in the "ſtill, ſmall voice" of the Goſpel. He condeſcends to treat with them on the moſt honourable and advantageous terms; and, with the ſofteſt perſuaſions, he mingles the moſt precious promiſes. From darkneſs and death, he calls them to light and life:—from miſery and woe, to happineſs and joy:—from ſhame and diſgrace, to glory and honour:—from the ſhocking ſlavery of ſin, and the inſupportable drudgery of the Devil, to the glorious liberty of the ſons of God, and to a crown and kingdom that ſhall never be raviſhed from them.—Awake then, "thou that ſleepeſt;" beſtir thyſelf, and come forth: the Holy Spirit calls thee.—"Ariſe from the dead;" remain no longer in that ſinful and deadly ſleep into which thou art fallen: rouſe thyſelf from that lethargick indolence that ſtupifies thy ſenſes; for if thou wilt not endeavour to throw off thoſe fetters with which thou art bound; perhaps, thou mayeſt there lie till thou art overtaken with the ſleep of death eternal. Call forth all thine active powers; ſtretch out thy hand to Jeſus who calls thee, and he "will give thee light." He will open thy blinded eyes;

eyes; he will make the rays of his heavenly light to ſhine into thy ſoul; he will warm thy cold, and animate thy lifeleſs heart, with his cheering and quickening beams. "Awake *then*, thou that ſleepeſt, and ariſe from the dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee light:"—for "now it is high time to awake out of ſleep."

In further diſcourſing from theſe words, we ſhall endeavour, FIRST, To make ſome uſeful *Obſervations* on the words of our Text.—SECONDLY, To recommend and enforce the *Duty* here enjoined; in order that, with the bleſſing of Heaven, we may perſuade you to beſtir yourſelves, and ſhake off your ſpiritual ſloth.—And, THIRDLY, Take ſome notice of the *Encouragement* here given to excite us to activity and diligence in duty.

And may the ſame God who at firſt infuſed natural life into our bodies, and, by his ſpirit, animated our breathleſs clay, enabling us to think and act, be now graciouſly pleaſed to infuſe into our ſouls a vital ſpark of the divine and ſpiritual life, to quicken them, dead in treſpaſſes and ſins, ſo that they may ariſe to light and life eternal.

I. We are to make a few uſeful *bſervations* on the words of our Text.

Commentators are divided in opinion about the

the ſuppoſed difference between *awaking* o of ſleep, and *ariſing* from the dead: and v ther the former of theſe may not refer to ſl dering Believers; and the latter to unregene ſinners.

As to *awaking* out of ſleep, and *iſing* from the dead, they ſeem to be terms early of the ſame import; for *death* is frequ dly repreſented in Scripture under the ima of *ſleep*; and is called, "The ſleep of dea *"—Accordingly, we often read of perſons ping with their fathers: and *awakening* o of this ſleep we find to be the ſame with r g from the dead; as in theſe words, "Man of them that ſleep in the duſt of the earth ſh awake."†—Both of theſe expreſſions, if w conſider them as what God formerly ſpake by his Prophets, relating to the calling and nverſion of the Gentiles, refer to their miſer le ſtate and condition, prior to their being cal d out of it by his grace.

But although theſe words may have a refere to the calling and converſion of the heath world, I ſee no reaſon why we ſhould not conſider them as ſpoken in the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, by his Apoſtles and Miniſters, to every thoughtleſs and unconverted ſinner of Adam's poſterity; yea, even to the regenerate themſelves, who frequently may be ſaid to ſleep.

* Pſal. xiii. 3. † Dan. xii. 2.

Whilſt

Whilſt in his natural and unconverted ſtate, man is in a faſt, a ſound, a dead ſleep; like one in a deep lethargy who never awakes.—How neceſſary then, that he be called upon, that he be rouſed, and, if poſſible, made to ariſe from this dangerous and deadly ſleep! "Awake, thou that ſleepeſt."

Nor is it the *natural*, or unconverted, man only that ſleeps, but even the *regenerate* ſleep at times, and do not keep themſelves ſo well awake as they ought. But ſtill there is a difference between them. The wiſe and the fooliſh virgins ſlumbered and ſlept: The fooliſh ſlept; but the wiſe only ſlumbered.—The diſciples themſelves, when by their Lord's ſide, and ſurrounded with dangers, could not watch with him one hour; but fell aſleep.—Thus we ſee, That even the beſt Chriſtians have need to be awaked from their *ſlumbers*, as well as careleſs and indolent ſinners to be rouſed from their *ſleep*. But as theſe laſt mentioned are the greateſt objects of compaſſion, the ſequel of this Diſcourſe ſhall be addreſſed chiefly to ſuch as are under this deſcription.

Theſe are called *awake* out of their ſleep of ignorance, ſtupidity and inſenſibility; to *ariſe* from the bed of ſin and guilt, in which they have hitherto lien; and from which the almighty power of Chriſt only, attending his command,

command, can awake and raiſe them.—With great propriety may ſinners be ſaid to ſleep, for their minds are filled with vain and fooliſh imaginations; they dream of joys, and of happineſs; they fondly think that they lay hold on ſubſtantial bliſs, and acquire laſting pleaſures, when they only ſnatch at a ſhadow, and graſp at the empty air!—As in a profound ſleep all ſenſe of danger is ſuſpended, however dreadful our ſituation may be; ſo the ſinner, lulled into a deep ſleep, within the enchanting arms of vice, loſes all ſenſe of his deplorable condition: he will not be awakened to learn his terrible ſituation, nor open his eyes to behold the horrid abyſs that yawns to receive him!—O how ſtrangely infatuating is ſin!—What would we think of the ſailor who ſhould deliberately lay himſelf down to ſleep on the top of a maſt, when the ſtormy winds heave the raging billows, blending the airy and watery elements, and from the ſummit of the mountain-ſwollen wave, diſcovers the dark caverns of the deep? We ſhould ſurely think him bereft of his ſenſes, or altogether weary of life. But what wiſer, or leſs deſperate, are we?—We, who, in the moſt ſupine indolence, lie faſt aſleep, in the arms of ſin, upon the very brink of eternal perdition, where the ſmalleſt movement may, in a moment, plunge

plunge us into an unfathomable ocean of unutterable woe!—Nay, ſo ſtupified are all the faculties of our ſoul, and ſo intoxicated with the ſubtle poiſon, that we ſhut our ears againſt the calls of Providence and Grace, ſo that neither the pleadings of love, nor the threatenings of wrath, can rouſe us from our inſenſibility! Nor will even hell herſelf, though opening wide her tremendous jaws beneath our feet, make us open our eyes to ſee our danger!—Horrible enchantment! Have ſinners no regard for their ſafety?—Have they no love for their immortal ſouls?—And is it all one to them whether they are everlaſtingly happy, or eternally miſerable?—Has Heaven no pleaſures that can allure?—Hell no terrors that can affright?—And is there no difference between an eternity of agonizing pain, and that of ineffable joy?—Can you anſwer all theſe in the negative? By your actions you now do; but be aſſured that an awakened conſcience will one day uſe a very different language.

Now, O ſinner, now is the time to awake out of ſleep, whilſt you may eſcape from the vengeance of your offended God.—Still the day of grace remains;—ſtill you have the offers of peace and reconciliation. It will not be ſo always. The ſhadows of the evening increaſe;

and your ſun, which has ſhone ſo long, and ſo bright, may ſoon ſet in endleſs night;—night, without one cheering ray, where darkneſs, death, and deſpair, in awful horror reign!—And if you are thus overtaken, how ſad will be the awakening! "Who among us ſhall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us ſhall dwell with everlaſting burnings?"—Do but once think how near you may be to this dreadful and unalterable ſtate. Conſider on what a ſlender thread hang your everlaſting and moſt important concerns. We are ſurrounded with numberleſs dangers and diſeaſes, which lie in wait to hurry us to our laſt abode. Upon the feeble ſtrings of life depends our fate. Infinite joy, or endleſs ſorrow, awaits every breath we draw. And yet, oh! how unconcerned we lie upon the very margin of death's cold flood, and over the mouth of the all-devouring grave!—Awake us, O Lord, awake our drowſy and lethargick ſouls, leſt they "ſleep the ſleep of death."—Rouſe us from our carnal ſecurity: and when we are called to walk through the dark valley, let thy preſence attend our ſteps; when removed hence, may our ſouls be found of thee in perfect peace.

Nor is it to the *drowſy* and *ſleeping* ſinner only that the call is here given; but alſo to thoſe

thoſe who are held in the bonds of *ſpiritual death:* "Riſe from the dead."

By "riſing from the dead," we may here underſtand a coming forth from that inactivity, liſtleſsneſs, and deadneſs of ſoul, in which the unconverted lie.—While the ſoul is abſent from God, it is, with reſpect to divine things, in a dead ſleep. All its active powers to do good lie dormant, and, in a manner, dead and buried. Nay, ſo faſt are the unconverted held by this deadly ſleep, that nothing leſs than that almighty Power, which at firſt raiſed from nothing all theſe ſurrounding worlds, can awake them!—Well may a ſtate of ſin and iniquity be compared to a ſtate of death: For, as the dead body is deprived of all its ſenſes, and can neither think nor act, ſo the ſoul that is "dead in treſpaſſes and ſins," hath no proper ſenſe of duty; no knowledge of right or wrong. "He knoweth not the things of the ſpirit of God; neither can he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually diſcerned."* His groſs and groveling ideas cannot riſe above ſenſual purſuits; no can he once, with proper diſcernment, think on "the things that are above." And as to his performing the works of God, and the things that are holy and acceptable in the ſight of

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

Heaven, he is as unable, as a marble ſtatue is, to perform the functions of life.

With much propriety, therefore, may *a ſtate of ſin* be compared to a *deep ſleep*, and *a ſtate of death*; becauſe all the faculties of the ſoul are ſo ſtupified and benumbed with ignorance and indolence, that they have neither any inclination, nor any ability to do good. How awful, how ſhocking, ſuch a ſtate as this!—What dreadful infatuation, to go through life in golden dreams of imaginary bliſs, inſenſible of ſurrounding dangers, and regardleſs of futurity, till rouſed from our lethargy by the commencement of never-ending torments!—O, my brethren! "Sleep not as others do; but watch, and be ſober."—Let your loins be girded about, your lights burning; and you like men who wait for the coming of their Lord. "Bleſſed is that ſervant whom his lord, when he cometh, ſhall find ſo doing."—Shall we be among the unhappy number of thoſe who think that they are alive, when they are ſpiritually dead? Shall we contentedly lie, and pine, and die in our ſins, without once lifting up our eyes, or ſtretching out our hands, to the kind Phyſician of ſouls, who graciouſly waits to effectuate our cure?—Forbid it Lord! Awake us by thy call,

and

and ſtir us up to exert ourſelves in the performance of that which thou haſt commanded.

When our ſpirits are depreſſed, and our ſouls are diſquieted within us, at the thought of our ignorance and impotency, let us, my Chriſtian friends, comfort our hearts with this reviving reflection, That though dark in ourſelves, we ſhall be light in the Lord; though weak in reſpect of our own powers, yet in him we are ſtrong: for he hath promiſed to make his ſtrength perfect in our weakneſs. He calls us to *awake* out of our ſinful *ſleep*, and to *ariſe* from the *death* of ſin to everlaſting life. But in this he does not require what is utterly impoſſible: for that would be an inſulting of his creatures, whom he rather pities and compaſſionates. —Whatever duty he requires, he will give ſtrength and ability to perform it.—True indeed, we are both unwilling to awake from our fatal ſecurity, and unable to ariſe from that death-like ſtate into which, through ſin, we are fallen: But *Omnipotence* can awake us; and *He* will enable us to ariſe. The man who had the withered hand could not ſtretch it oút, before he was commanded to do it: but, as ſoon as bid, he made the attempt; and immediately found ſtrength reſtored to the formerly uſeleſs member. Had the poor man refuſed to comply

with the command of our bleſſed Lord, and, inſtead of making the trial, ſet himſelf down to reaſon on the impoſſibility of the thing, he might have gone down to his grave without being made whole.—In like manner, let us attempt to rouſe ourſelves from the ſleep of ſin and death, and we ſhall undoubtedly find a ſufficiency of heavenly ſtrength imparted unto us. When Chriſt calls forth to action, he alſo ſtands by to aſſiſt. He never ſends any man upon a warfare at his own charges; but hath aſſured us, That according to our wants we ſhall receive an ample ſupply.

Having ſaid ſo much on the FIRST part of our ſubject, I ſhall now, as propoſed, in the SECOND place, proceed,

II. To recommend, and enforce the *Duty* here enjoined, in order that, with the bleſſing of Heaven, I may perſuade you to beſtir yourſelves, and ſhake off this ſpiritual ſloth.

I have, in ſome meaſure, already ſhown you how dangerous, and how dreadful the ſtate of an impenitent and unconverted ſinner is:—— dreadful indeed! but, bleſſed be God, not altogether deſperate; for the great deſign of the Father of Mercies is to awake men from the woful ſleep of ſin and death, by means of his Spirit

Spirit and his Word, to the end that Chriſt may give them light.——This too often fatal ſleep in ſin is not a caſual thing, but connatural with our preſent ſtate of guilt and depravity.—It is not by chance, but by choice, that the ſenſual ſoul ſleeps, which makes his condition the more hazardous and awful. How aſtoniſhing, that the ſinner can ſleep thus ſoundly, under ſuch a load of guilt, with ſo many wounds in his conſcience, and ſo many putrifying ulcers in his ſoul!—Can the man that is ſeized with an acute and deadly diſeaſe ſleep ſoftly and pleaſantly?—Can the debtor, who every moment expects the officers of juſtice to arreſt him, and drag him to the dreary dungeon of ſome loathſome priſon, where he muſt for ever remain, calmly ſleep?—Can the condemned malefactor, with the axe, or the gibbet before him, ſleep quietly and in peace? No, ſurely.—But, what is much more aſtoniſhing, the ſinner can, though he is, ſpiritually, in each of theſe ſituations! Yea, although the Almighty thunders from above, and hell gapes from beneath, yet the ſinner, ſuſpended over it by the frail and fretted thread of life, can ſleep without uneaſineſs!—Dreadful infatuation!—How neceſſary that ſuch be rouſed, that they be quickly awaked out of their perilous ſleep; that they may ariſe from

the death of ſin, and come forth from the grave of ſenſuality, leſt they be there left to periſh for ever.

But if the ſtill, the calm voice of the Goſpel ſounds in vain, if the ſoft whiſpers of love, and the gentle accents of benevolence have no effect upon your ſluggiſh ſouls, if you are determined to pay no regard to the mild commands of your meek and compaſſionate Saviour, let the lightnings and thunders of Sinai, the horrible tempeſts, and dreadful "blackneſs of darkneſs," with the intolerable anguiſh and deſpair that await the obſtinate, the impenitent, and incorrigible offender awaken you.—Long have the offers of peace and reconciliation been tendered for your acceptance: and long have the patience and forbearance of God, which ſhould have led you to repentance, been exerciſed towards you. —But the Almighty will not always ſtrive with men; nor bear with their provocations. Think not, that "becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily," it ſhall never take place. —Hath not the Lord ſaid, "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompenſe?" Why wilt thou then, "after thy hardneſs and impenitent heart, treaſure up unto thyſelf wrath againſt the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"—Has not JEHO-

VAH

VAH declared, That he "ſhall be known towards his ſervants; and his indignation towards his enemies?"—That, "he will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire?"—Are you not forewarned, That "the day cometh which ſhall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly ſhall be ſtubble: and the day that cometh ſhall burn them up, ſaith the Lord of hoſts, that it ſhall leave them neither root nor branch?"

But, perhaps, all theſe dreadful threatenings make no impreſſion on you, and are only heard as words of courſe.——Be not deceived, my friends; "God is not a man that he ſhould lie; neither the ſon of man that he ſhould repent: hath he ſaid, and ſhall he not do it? Or, hath he ſpoken, and ſhall he not make it good?"—Why then, O ye fooliſh and unwiſe, will you thus daringly preſume upon the mercies of God?—Will you ſtill impiouſly ruſh upon the thick boſſes of the Almighty's bucklers, and provoke him to jealouſy, becauſe you are ſtronger than he?—Deſiſt, I beſeech you, deſiſt from carrying on ſuch an unequal conteſt. Lay down the weapons of your unrighteous rebellion; and accept of mercy and pardon, while yet you may. Peace and reconciliation are offered you, on the moſt

moſt honourable and advantageous conditions. Why will you reject the propoſals, and treat with contempt ſuch gracious terms of accommodation?—"Why ſhould ye be ſtricken any more? Will ye revolt more and more?" and finally bring inevitable deſtruction upon your own guilty heads?

But if you will not be perſuaded by the *terrors of the Lord*, if you are ſtill inſenſible of that dreadful danger to which you are expoſed, from the vengeance of an incenſed Deity, let me try to pierce your obdurate hearts, with the powerful and penetrating arrows of his *love*.

Think, O ſinner, on what the Father of Mercies has done for your ſalvation; on what the Son of the Higheſt has ſuffered, in order to redeem you from endleſs miſery; and on what he is ſtill doing, by his Holy Spirit, to make your happineſs complete.

Did not the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that adorable perſonage to whom every knee ſhall bow, and every tongue confeſs, diveſt himſelf of his primitive glory, take upon him the form of a ſervant, become a man of no reputation, expoſed to ſhame, poverty, and reproach; and, after enduring all the indignities that earth and hell could put upon him, offered up his precious life, upon the altar of the croſs, a ſacrifice to atone

for

for the guilt of ſuch helpleſs and periſhing tranſgreſſors as you are?—And ſhall ſuch amazing love have no effect upon your hearts? Will you ſtill ſtand out againſt him, and refuſe to be reconciled unto God?—Will you always deny him that loyal ſubjection, and that ſincere obedience, he ſo juſtly demands?—Will you ſtill continue to ſlight, and diſregard the calls of the now glorioufly exalted Redeemer, who ſo kindly intreats you to come unto him, that you may find reſt for your ſouls?—In the thoughtleſs and giddy ſeaſon of youth, in the midſt of worldly pleaſures and enjoyments, in the time of health and proſperity, you may neglect, you may ſlight, and even deſpiſe all theſe things. But remember, That for all theſe God will bring you to judgment; that there is a day coming, when you ſhall ſee things in a very different light; and when your ſentiments of this world, and the things thereof, ſhall be wonderfully changed. Sickneſs and a death-bed are powerful inſtructors; and make a great alteration in moſt men. Although we are fully perſuaded that death is inevitable, yet we ſeldom think of it, until we are alarmed by its approach. If, at any other time, it happens to obtrude itſelf, we do every thing in our power to baniſh the diſagreeable idea from our minds. But whether

ther we chooſe, or whether we refuſe, it is haſtening towards us apace. Having once received his commiſſion, no bribes will retard this unwelcome meſſenger, nor will any intreaties prevail with him to deſiſt from executing his orders.—Yield we muſt!—But, O ſinner, think on the awful horrors that ſhall ſeize the guilty ſoul, when about to leave her clay-built tenement, and appear before the dread tribunal of injured Mercy! Think on that anguiſh and deſpair which reflections on precious of time miſpent, on the day of grace neglected, the offers of mercy deſpiſed, the blood of Chriſt vilified and trampled upon, muſt then raiſe within him!—Such they will be as to force the diſtracted ſoul to cry "to the mountains and rocks, to fall on him, and hide him from the face of him that ſitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."*

One would imagine that the very idea of that awful and tremendous doom which awaits the deſpiſers of grace, would ſtrike terror and diſmay into the heart of the boldeſt, the moſt preſumptuous ſinner. But alas! ſuch will not think, ſuch will not reflect, until, like a thief in the night, it ſeizes them unawares. Then will they believe, then will they be perſuaded, that what the Oracles of Truth told them, that

* Rev. vi. 16.

what

what the Miniſters of Chriſt forewarned them of, was ſomething more than words of courſe, and a cunningly deviſed fable.

But wherefore, O infatuated, deluded, ſelf-deceiving, and ſoul-deſtroying ſinner, will you thus perſiſt in accompliſhing your own deſtruction?—Still you may flee from the wrath to come: ſtill there is hope concerning you.—The things that belong to your eternal peace are not yet hid from your eyes:—why then will you any longer reject the counſels of God againſt yourſelves?—The King of Glory proclaims a free amneſty to the moſt daring rebels, upon their ſubmitting to his righteous ſceptre.—The compaſſionate Jeſus is willing and ready to welcome even the greateſt of ſinners, who come to him, ſenſibly affected with their guilt and danger, labouring and groaning under the burthen of their iniquity.—And ſhall ſuch mercy, ſuch grace, have no influence upon your hearts? no power to kindle within them a flame of gratitude and love to him who earneſtly deſires to make you happy?—He hath no pleaſure in your deſtruction. He hath ſworn by himſelf, That he delighteth not "in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O Houſe of Iſrael?"

Iſrael?"* Hearken to theſe his plaintive and compaſſionate expoſtulations; and let them pierce your ſouls. "How ſhall I give thee up, Ephraim? How ſhall I deliver thee, Iſrael? How ſhall I make thee as Admah? How ſhall I ſet thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceneſs of mine anger; I will not return to deſtroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man."†

Is the eternal JEHOVAH thus concerned for your immortal happineſs? and will you be totally regardleſs of it? "Ye ſtiff-necked and uncircumciſed in heart and ears, will ye always reſiſt the Holy Ghoſt?"—Turn to him, I beſeech you, turn to him, from whom you have deeply revolted, and he will have mercy; he will heal your backſlidings, love you freely, and receive you graciouſly. Come unto Chriſt, and accept of him as he is kindly offered in the Goſpel, and delay it not. "For if he that deſpiſed Moſes' Law died without mercy,—of how much ſorer puniſhment, ſuppoſe ye, ſhall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the Covenant, wherewith he was ſanctified an unholy thing, and hath done deſpite unto the Spirit of Grace?"

* Ezek. xxxiii. 11. † Hoſ. xi. 8, 9.

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Having thus endeavoured to recommend and enforce the *Duty* commanded in the Text, I ſhall now, as propoſed, in the THIRD place,

III. Take ſome notice of the *Encouragement* here given to excite us to activity and diligence in duty, namely, "Chriſt will give us light."

Omitting many of the various ſenſes in which the word *Light* is uſed in Scripture, I ſhall only obſerve, that it ſometimes ſignifies, that true and ſaving *knowledge*, that illumination of the underſtanding, which the Author and Fountain of all light and wiſdom, whether natural or ſpiritual, communicates unto his people.—It is alſo uſed to denote that inward *joy*, that real *happineſs*, and true *proſperity* which the God of Grace gives unto his choſen ſervants.—It likewiſe ſignifies, that *ſupport* under, and *deliverance* from, all the troubles and afflictions to which they are expoſed in this ſtate of mortality.—Of this divine light, wiſdom and knowledge, Chriſt has promiſed to impart to all his faithful followers. This is moſt neceſſary for them; becauſe, until the human mind is illumined with this celeſtial light, all mankind may be ſaid to grope in darkneſs, and to wander in a labyrinth of ignorance and error. As the lonely traveller, ſurrounded by thick fogs, traverſes the

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the unknown wilds of ſome ſolitary deſert, without knowing whither he goes; and is in the greateſt danger of falling into fits; of tumbling down precipices; of becoming a prey to ſavage beaſts, and barbarous men; ſo the natural man, groping his way amidſt the thick miſts that envelope his unenlightened ſoul, ſtaggers on, in conſtant danger of falling into the pit of deſtruction; of tumbling down the horrid precipices of ſin and guilt, thence to riſe no more; and is continually expoſed to the too often fatal ſnares, and infernal cruelty of remorſeleſs devils.

But here is the comfort of the humble and penitent ſinner, "Chriſt will give him light." The candle of the Lord within him will enlighten his path, and make him to walk on without dread or danger. He who is the Light of the world, and the Life of men, will cauſe his heavenly beams to penetrate the thickeſt cloud, and diſpel the deepeſt gloom. He will irradiate his underſtanding, and make him to ſee and know clearly. The ſcales of ignorance ſhall fall from his eyes, and the vail of error be removed.—He ſhall be awaked from his ſinful ſleep, and ariſe from dead works to newneſs of life. Chriſt will give him to ſee his loſt and undone ſtate, by nature and wicked works; and make him know how much he is become, by both,

both, a child of wrath, an heir of hell, and an outcaſt from heaven.—Being thus made ſenſible of his miſery and wretchedneſs, then he will be enabled to look up to the divine Phyſician of ſouls, for a healing balm to his wounded conſcience, and a reviving cordial to his ſin ſick ſoul. Being now no longer in darkneſs, with the bright eye of a ſaving faith, he ſhall look unto Jeſus for peace, for pardon, and every bleſſing: nor ſhall he look in vain.—As the man who has paſſed the ſullen night in frightful dreams and terrifying viſions, rejoices to open his eyes upon the cheerful light of the morning, and, finding himſelf in a place of ſafety, wonders at his vain fears; ſo the ſinner, after having paſſed a long night of darkneſs and doubt, under the terrors of the *law* and the alarms of an awakened *conſcience*, when he finds the dawnings of grace begun in his ſoul, and the light of the SUN of Righteouſneſs ſhining into his heart, is filled with inexpreſſible ſatisfaction; and wonders no leſs at his former fears, than at the matchleſs love of his Saviour, who has brought him from darkneſs to light, from doubts and fears to aſſurance and joy, and from the dominion of ſin and Satan to the glorious liberty of the ſons of God.

This divine Light which Chriſt gives to his

people is not of a ſpeculative nature only; it is productive of real joy, true peace, and laſting felicity. "Verily, light is ſown for the righteous, and gladneſs for them that are upright in heart."—"The righteous ſhall rejoice in the Lord, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holineſs."—The ſoul that is raiſed from the death of ſin, and made alive in Chriſt, is born again, is adopted into the family of Heaven, and numbered among the children of God. Of conſequence, he is entitled to all their privileges; and has an undoubted right given him to every temporal as well as ſpiritual enjoyment; ſo far as his heavenly father ſees it conducive to his real happineſs.—If the all-wiſe Governour of the Univerſe ſees *proſperity* for his good, he will make "his paths to drop fatneſs" upon him.—The Lord "will be unto him as the dew unto Iſrael: he ſhall grow as the lily, and caſt forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches ſhall ſpread, and his beauty ſhall be as the olive tree, and his ſmell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his ſhadow ſhall return; they ſhall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the ſcent thereof ſhall be as the wine of Lebanon."*

Or, if infinite Wiſdom thinks it neceſſary to try him with *Adverſity*, yet will he not forſake him

* Hoſ. xiv. 5—7.

in

in his trouble: He will ſupport him under all his afflictions, and kindly remove them as ſoon as they ſhall have accompliſhed the gracious end for which they were ſent. When the day of thy deliverance is come, O Believer, "then ſhall thy light break forth as the morning; and thy health ſhall ſpring forth ſpeedily: and thy righteouſneſs ſhall go before thee; the glory of the Lord ſhall be thy rere-ward. Then ſhalt thou call, and the Lord ſhall anſwer: thou ſhalt cry, and he ſhall ſay, Here I am."*—He will fill the hearts of his ſaints with ineffable joy; and put a new ſong of praiſe into their mouths. Having looſed their ſackcloth, and girded them with gladneſs, they ſhall be able to addreſs their foes in theſe words of hope, ſubmiſſion and confidence; "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I ſhall ariſe: when I ſit in darkneſs, the Lord ſhall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, becauſe I have ſinned againſt him, until he plead my cauſe, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I ſhall behold his righteouſneſs."†

From what has been ſaid, my brethren, let us learn the great neceſſity we are under of ſhaking off this dangerous ſloth that has ſeized

* Iſa. lviii. 8, 9. † Mic. vii. 8, 9.

our ſpiritual man; and of ariſing from that deadly ſtate of ſin and guilt, in which we have too long remained.——Does Chriſt call us to awake? Let us hearken to his call.—Does he command us to ariſe from the dead? Let us make the attempt, and he will give us power to ariſe, with light to conduct us in the way that leads to glory and life everlaſting.——— "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of ſleep. The night is far ſpent; the day is at hand: let us therefore put off the works of darkneſs, and put on the armour of light."—"Behold, now is the accepted time; now is the day of ſalvation."—O beware, leſt you loſe theſe precious moments in ſlumbering and ſleeping; or in doing ſuch things as will profit you nothing at a dying hour!—"Rather give all diligence to make your calling and election ſure: for ſo an entrance ſhall be miniſtred unto you abundantly, into the everlaſting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jeſus Chriſt."*

How fooliſh and undeſerving would we think the man, who, having it in his power to acquire ineſtimable gain, ſhould loiter away the precious time, given him for that purpoſe, in the moſt abject poverty and indolence?—But what leſs unwiſe, and unworthy, are we?—

* 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

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We who conſume our days in vanity, and ſpend, in the moſt ſupine negligence, the time given us to obtain the riches of eternity?—Awake, our drowſy and ſleeping powers, and ſhake off that deſtructive indolence!——What work ſo great as that of the ſoul's ſalvation! And yet in nothing are we ſo backward and ſluggiſh!

Shall the ambitious man deprive his body of its natural reſt?—Shall he rack his invention day and night to accompliſh his deſires, and gain the ſummit of what he, ignorantly, calls *Happineſs?*—And ſhall we, who have the higheſt honours, and the moſt certain pleaſures, within our reach, waſte our time in the moſt ſhameful ſloth?—Shall the hardy ſailor, in a ſmall veſſel, plough the briny deep; and, regardleſs of danger, brave the combined force of winds and waves, in hopes of bringing home the treaſures of ſome diſtant ſhore?—And ſhall we refuſe to take the ſmalleſt trouble, and fear to enter on our voyage heaven-ward, though aſſured of a proſperous gale, and a happy landing on the bliſsful coaſts of Immanuel, where we ſhall find treaſures which will enrich us through eternal ages!—Shall the brave ſoldier endure, with patience and fortitude, the fatigues and dangers of a long campaign; and contentedly anticipate, as the reward of all his toil, reſt

in the bed of honour?—And, O ſhameful!—ſhall we ſtart at imaginary dangers, and tremble at the thought of a few inconveniencies, when we have a *Crown* and a *Kingdom* to ſtrive for; and the everlaſting poſſeſſion of them promiſed, as the reward of our labours?—No, Chriſtians!—Let not us, of all men, be the moſt careleſs and indifferent, about things of the higheſt value. But, eſteeming them as we ought, let us neither give ſleep to our eyes, nor ſlumber to our eye-lids, till we have attained a well-grounded hope, and a full aſſurance, of an habitation in thoſe celeſtial manſions, where our renewed man ſhall never weary, nor grow languid in the ſervice of God;—where freſh joys perpetually flow from the Fountain of Life; joys which will delight our ſouls, whilſt eternity ſhall run its endleſs rounds.—Let us awake from our ſleep, ariſe from the dead, and come forth to holineſs and newneſs of life, before the alarming ſound of the laſt trumpet, gives the ſignal to judgment.

May the Father of Mercies magnify the power of his Grace in our ſalvation; and by his bleſſed ſpirit enable us to "work out our own ſalvation with fear and trembling,—while it is day, and before the night come, when no man can work;" for Chriſt's ſake. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XI.

UNLAWFUL OATHS PROHIBITED.

MATTHEW V. 34, 37.

SWEAR NOT AT ALL;—BUT LET YOUR COMMUNICATION BE, YEA, YEA; NAY, NAY: FOR WHATSOEVER IS MORE THAN THESE COMETH OF EVIL.

TO warn the thoughtleſs, and alarm the preſumptuous ſinner, is a moſt neceſſary part of the miniſterial office.—To preach the Goſpel of Peace,—to hold forth the all-ſufficiency of a Saviour's righteouſneſs,—to exalt the Redeemer's merits, and apply them to ourſelves, as the procuring cauſe of our juſtification in the ſight of God,—to draw ſinners to Chriſt with the cords of love and the bands of a man, are more pleaſing and delightful employments. But when thoſe means prove ineffectual, when the obſtinate offender pays no regard thereto,—when the calls of the Goſpel are to him "as a ſounding braſs, and a tinkling cymbal," or, at beſt, as the ſweet ſound of one that plays or

ſings well, which for a time pleaſes the ear, but makes no further impreſſion, then ought the watchmen of Iſrael to "cry aloud and ſpare not: to lift up their voice like a trumpet, and ſhew the people their tranſgreſſion, and the houſe of Jacob their ſins."

Convinced that the thunders of *Sinai* are, at times, no leſs needful than the joyful ſound of *Zion*, I conſider it as my duty, upon occaſions, to call your attention to both. However much it may be the cuſtom of ſome, who denominate themſelves *Goſpel-Miniſters*, to be always ſaying ſmooth things to their people, and crying "Peace, peace, when there is no peace;"—however much, and ſincerely, I value your favour and eſteem, it ſhall be my taſk, through God's grace, to preach, at all times, what I judge to be expedient and uſeful.—I will dare, when I think it neceſſary, to hold forth "the law, which is holy, juſt and good;" to enforce its particular precepts; and to ſtrike at particular ſins:—And I am perſuaded That not one commandment in the Decalogue is more frequently, more daringly, and more preſumptuouſly violated, than that which forbids the profaning and abuſing of God's ſacred name.

It is with real pleaſure I now ſay, and I truſt upon good ground, That this Diſcourſe will be applicable

applicable to few here preſent. To moſt of you, I hope, the name of *God*, and his *Chriſt*, is dear, is "precious as ointment poured forth." Nevertheleſs, I have more than ſufficient reaſon to fear, That there are ſtill ſome to whom it may, with but too much propriety, be addreſſed. —And if there is only one ſuch ſinner in this Aſſembly, it is my duty to warn him of his danger, if haply, through the mercy of God, he may yet flee from the wrath to come.

In further handling this ſubject, all I intend, at preſent, is, FIRST,—To make a few Obſervations on the words of the Text; or on *Oaths* in general.—And, SECONDLY, as being the principal deſign of our preſent Exerciſe,—To apply them, as they reſpect *common and habitual ſwearers*, who, in their ordinary converſation, are accuſtomed to profane and diſhonour the ſacred name of the moſt high God.

I. We are to make a few Obſervations on the words of the Text; or on *Oaths* in general.

Here our bleſſed Lord condemns the deteſtable doctrine which the Jewiſh Doctors taught, in regard to oaths., They maintained, That oaths were only obligatory, according to the nature of the thing a perſon ſwore by.—Hence they allowed, in common converſation, ſuch

oaths

oaths as they ſaid were not obligatory; pretending that there was no harm in them, becauſe the Law which forbade them to perjure themſelves, and commanded them to perform their vows, meant thoſe only which were of a ſolemn and binding nature.

In oppoſition to thoſe wicked principles and practices, the Son of God forbade them to ſwear at all, unleſs they intended to perform; becauſe every oath, even the moſt common, was binding: And therefore, he who ſwears by *Heaven*, by the *Earth*, by *Jeruſalem*, or by his own *Head*, which oaths ſeem to have been common among the Jews at that time, is, notwithſtanding their opinion to the contrary, guilty of perjury, if he does not perform them.

An oath is a moſt ſolemn act whereby we appeal to God, the ſearcher of our hearts; and call on him to witneſs the truth of what we ſay, or what we promiſe. Had man continued in his original ſtate of innocence, there never would have been any need of an oath to decide a controverſy: for then, no ſuſpicion of lying and deceiving would have been known in human ſociety. But as the entrance of ſin into the world has produced diffidence and diſtruſt among men, oaths are ſometimes indiſpenſably neceſſary for confirming the truth, and deciding controverſies.

controverſies.—When neither our perſonal authority, nor the authority of the thing in queſtion, are ſufficient to give that weight, or procure that credit which is requiſite, it becomes neceſſary for us to call upon the holineſs and majeſty of Almighty God to give force and ſanction to our words, ſo that they may make the deſired impreſſion on the hearts and judgments of thoſe who hear them.

Oaths may be reckoned among the bonds of human ſociety; and, of conſequence, are neceſſary to its exiſtence. Kings may employ oaths for ſecuring the fidelity and allegiance of their ſubjects.—Generals and Commanders of armies may adminiſter oaths to their ſoldiers:—and Magiſtrates may uſe them for terminating differences among the people.—Yea, in contracts, in covenants, and engagements of a ſolemn nature, they may be employed religiouſly and properly.—In this, however, many have been of a different opinion.—We have heard of ſome heathen philoſophers who, through pride, refuſed to ſwear; alledging, as a reaſon, That a wiſe man ought always to be believed on his word alone.—There are alſo many Chriſtians who refuſe to ſwear, from a tenderneſs of conſcience. And ſome go ſo far as to hold it unlawful to ſwear in any caſe whatever; grounding

ing their opinion on the words of our Text, "Swear not at all."—This is certainly a miſtaken interpretation of the words: For it is plain that our Lord does not here abſolutely *prohibit*, but only *limit* oaths. He forbids men to ſwear raſhly and profanely; which many do in common converſation: he forbids them to ſwear by any of the creatures: he forbids them to ſwear on trifling and frivolous occaſions; there being much ſin in ſo doing. Nevertheleſs, when they are lawfully called to take an oath, it is then both a neceſſary and a Chriſtian duty.

This will appear ſelf-evident, if we conſider, That there is nothing in an oath but what has a tendency to exalt the honour and glory of God: for we therein acknowledge his omnipotence and his omniſcience: we confeſs that he is the ſearcher of our hearts and the witneſs of our actions; and that he will not fail to puniſh the falſe heart, and the lying tongue.

Beſides, we find that under the Old Teſtament diſpenſation, an oath was not only permitted, but expreſsly ordered, for ſettling matters in diſpute, as is evident from theſe words; "If a man deliver unto his neighbour an aſs, or an ox, or a ſheep, or any beaſt to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man ſeeing it:

it: then ſhall an oath of the Lord be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbours goods; and the owner of it ſhall accept thereof and he ſhall not make it good.* —We alſo find God's ancient Prophets, when ſpeaking of the glorious times of the Meſſiah, deſcribing the Gentile nations as "ſwearing to the Lord of hoſts."†—Under the New Teſtament, the purer times of the Goſpel, we are told, by the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles himſelf, That "an oath for confirmation is an end of all ſtrife."‡ And, in many paſſages of his writings, we find him appealing to God for the truth of what he aſſerts; as in the following, "I call God for a record upon my ſoul."—"Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God I lie not."——"I ſay the truth in Chriſt, I lie not,—my conſcience alſo bearing me witneſs in the Holy Ghoſt."—We likewiſe find that the Angel, mentioned by St. John, who ſtood upon the ſea and the earth, lifted up his hand to heaven, and ſware by him that liveth for ever and ever §.—Yea, we find God himſelf, in condeſcenſion to our weakneſs, and to convince us of his immutability, confirming his word by an *oath*, as St. Paul

* Exod. xxii. 10, 11. † Iſa. xix. 18. ‡ Heb. vi. 16.
§ Rev. x. 6.

thus

thus remarks; "When God made promiſe to Abraham, becauſe he could ſwear by no greater, he ſware by himſelf, ſaying, Surely bleſſing I will bleſs thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee."*—And in the ſame epiſtle he tells us, That Chriſt was conſecrated an High Prieſt by an oath; alluding to theſe words in the 110th Pſalm, "The Lord hath ſworn, and will not repent; Thou art a Prieſt for ever, after the order of Melchizedeck."—"I," ſaith God, "I lift up my hand to heaven, and ſay, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering ſword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and reward them that hate me."†—"I ſware in my wrath that they ſhould not enter into my reſt."‡

Here, it may not be improper to obſerve, That the *oath* of God can add no further validity to his *word*, nor greater certainty to his promiſe: for "the word of our God ſhall ſtand for ever." Having once ſpoken, he will moſt aſſuredly perform. "God is not a man that he ſhould lie, neither the ſon of man that he ſhould repent: hath he ſaid, and ſhall he not do it? hath he ſpoken, and ſhall he not make it good?" His promiſe fails not; and "the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

* Heb. vi. 13, 14. † Deut. xxxii. 40, 41. ‡ Pſal. xcv. 11.

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The only diſtinction that can well be made betwixt the *word* and the *oath* of God, as ſome have properly obſerved, ſeems to conſiſt in this, —That the *word* of God is, for the moſt part, a movement of only *one* of his divine perfections: it is either the word of his *power*, of his *wiſdom*, of his *juſtice*, or of his *mercy*. But, when an *oath* is added to it, all the eſſence of Deity, ſo to ſpeak, and all the divine attributes, as it were, unite and engage to ſupport, to make good that *word*, whether it be the word of his power, of his wiſdom, his juſtice, or his mercy. —The *oath* of God is therefore an aſſemblage of *all* the rays of his glory, and of his divine Majeſty.

Hence it is apparent that our Lord never meant, by the words of the Text, to prohibit oaths of every kind, and on every occaſion: but rather, thereby, to teach us That, when men are legally called to take an oath, they muſt do it in the name of *God* only; and not in the name of any of the *creatures*, as the Phariſees of old did, who ſwore by *heaven*, by the *earth*, and by *Jeruſalem*: And as ſome heretics, of later times, are ſaid to have done; who believed that they might ſwear by *ſalt*, by *water*, by the *winds*, and ſuch like.—The reaſon why men are forbidden to ſwear by the *creatures* is obvious. For

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as an oath is a ſolemn act of religious worſhip that is due to God only, it cannot be taken in the name of any of his creatures, without aſcribing *deity* to them, and putting them in God's ſtead. Beſides, ſwearing by any creature would leſſen the reſpect, and diminiſh the ſanctity of an oath; for thoſe who ſwear by them, would have no fear of being puniſhed for their perjury. Therefore, ſaith the Jewiſh Legiſlator, "Thou ſhalt fear the Lord thy God, and ſerve him, and ſhalt ſwear by his name."*—"But," ſaith the Apoſtle James, "above all things, my brethren, ſwear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; leſt ye fall into condemnation."†.

When we are neceſſarily and properly called to take an oath, then it behoves us to do it *ſincerely*, *faithfully*, *juſtly*, and with a full conviction of the *truth* of what we aſſert.—Hence it follows, That thoſe who, by oath, affirm a thing to be *true* which they know to be *falſe*; who thereby promiſe what they mean not to perform; who abuſe the ſanctity of an oath, to give authority and authenticity to their lies and criminal falſhoods, ought to be held in the utmoſt abhorrence.

* Deut. vi. 13. † Chap. v. 12.

Perjury

Perjury, or a calling God to witneſs as *true*, what the deponent knows to be *falſe*, is of all crimes the moſt audacious: It is one of the moſt horrible ſins of which a man can be guilty; and it renders the criminal one of the vileſt monſters on earth.—Such a wretch attacks Deity itſelf; he openly inſults the Majeſty of Heaven; and tramples under foot the power of him who is Almighty. Perjury is a combination of the groſſeſt *impiety* towards God, and the baſeſt *injuſtice* towards men. It is a crime condemned by the light of nature; and it ſubjects the guilty perſon to the ſevereſt judgments of an omnipotent God.—And how can it be otherwiſe, ſince in the very form, or words, of an oath, a man voluntarily calls upon Heaven to puniſh him, if he ſwears falſely, and lies againſt the truth, to which he ſolemnly calls God as a witneſs?—It is the higheſt affront that a creature can put upon his Creator, that a ſinful mortal can put upon a holy and a juſt God: for he thereby makes him, not only the witneſs, but an abettor, and a favourer of falſity and injuſtice. —It alſo renders a man infamous in the world: it conſtitutes him a *miſcreant*, and an *enemy* to civil ſociety; and it juſtly deprives him of the privileges of a good citizen. For what man of principle, of honour or character, would chooſe

to aſſociate with a perjured perſon?—What man of juſtice and integrity would like to have dealings with another, in whoſe lips there is no truth? Or who would give credit to one that has been rendered infamous by falſhood and deceit?—Among the other evils that attend this deteſtable ſin, I may mention *anguiſh* of heart, and *remorſe* of conſcience. Theſe muſt certainly be the conſtant and inſeparable companions of a perjured perſon, whoſe mind can never be at eaſe; and on whoſe vitals a conſciouſneſs of guilt, like a never dying worm, will gnaw and prey without intermiſſion.

A perjured perſon is a *peſt* to ſociety, and a deſtroyer of all peace and union among mankind. Were there nothing to reſtrain men from taking falſe oaths, there would be an end to all truſt and confidence in one another; and we ſhould live together in a ſtate of mutual diſtruſt, conſtant jealouſy, and perpetual hoſtility, which would render life unſafe, undeſirable, and even a burthen.—Such as ſwear falſely are enemies to God and man, and puniſhable by the laws of both: and pity it is that they ſhould ſo often, in this life, eſcape the puniſhment due to their crimes: which frequently happens, partly through the mildneſs of our laws, but chiefly by the evading of them, through the ſophiſtry

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and chicanery of lawyers, hired to puzzle, to confound, to explain away common ſenſe, in order to ſcreen the guilty.

But let thoſe ſons of wickedneſs be aſſured, That, although they may eſcape puniſhment from men, they ſhall not eſcape the righteous judgment of God. The ſovereign Judge of all fleſh, who hath ſolemnly declared vengeance againſt thoſe who "take his name in vain," will not fail to puniſh them in an exemplary manner.—Attend to his awful, but juſt, threatening denounced againſt all ſuch, in theſe words of the prophet Zechariah; "I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he," viz. the Angel that talked with him, "ſaid unto me, What ſeeſt thou? And I anſwered, I ſee a flying roll; the length thereof is twenty cubits, and the breadth thereof ten cubits. Then ſaid he unto me, This is the curſe that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth: for every one that ſtealeth ſhall be cut off as on this ſide according to it; and every one that ſweareth ſhall be cut off as on that ſide according to it. I will bring it forth, ſaith the Lord of hoſts, and it ſhall enter into the houſe of the thief, and into the houſe of him that ſweareth falſely by my name: and it ſhall remain in the midſt of his houſe, and ſhall

conſume it, with the timber thereof, and the ſtones thereof."*

The perſon who takes an oath thereby declares his belief of the omnipotence, the omniſcience, and omnipreſence of the Deity. He acknowledges that God ſees him; that he is the witneſs of all his actions, and is well acquainted with the moſt ſecret thoughts of his heart; that he will one day bring to light the hidden things of darkneſs, diſcover the truth of what he aſſerts, and puniſh the falſe ſwearer according to his demerits.—But the perjured wretch ſeems to have loſt all juſt notions of God, and his divine perfections. By his conduct we are led to believe that he verily thinks God ignorant of what paſſes in the world, or is very indifferent about it; that he either approves of falſhood, or has not the power to puniſh it.—Now, if God really is, what he hath declared himſelf to be, "a God jealous for his holy name," how dreadful the puniſhment that he will inflict on thoſe monſters of wickedneſs, who do what they can to rob him of his God-head; who treat him as a feeble mortal, whom they call upon to bear teſtimony to their lies and villainies; who attack him with effrontery, and ſet his power at defiance!—The pious ſoul muſt

* Chap. v. 1, 2, &c.

ſhudder

ſhudder at the thought.——May the Lord in mercy look upon ſuch daring offenders; may he convince them of the awfully dangerous ſtate they are in; and exert the power of his grace to pluck them as brands out of the burning!

From what has now been ſaid on *oaths* in general, we may infer their ſacred nature, and learn how exceedingly careful we ſhould be never to promiſe, nor to engage, by oath, to do any thing that is in itſelf bad, or that may have a pernicious tendency.—By not reflecting on this, Saul, the firſt king of the Iſraelites, who ſwore that he would put to death any man that taſted the ſmalleſt portion of food, until he was avenged of his enemies, was guilty of the higheſt imprudence.* Through the ſame cauſe Herod was alſo guilty of a moſt enormous crime; for he thereby became the murderer of John the Baptiſt.†—And, through this want of reflection, did the forty Jews, who bound themſelves by an oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul, become guilty of a heinous ſin.‡

Hence we may alſo learn, That we ought never to ſwear unleſs in caſes of urgent neceſſity, and when we have no other way of convincing

* 1 Sam. xiv. 24. † Matt. xiv. 7. ‡ Acts xxiii. 12.

men as to the truth of what we affirm, or deny. —When we ſpeak of the Deity, it ſhould always be with a holy fear, and a religious reverence. But this ſacred fear, this reverential awe, is loſt, when we often, and without neceſſity, appeal to God for the truth of our words.

With reſpect to the uſe and ſolemnity of an oath, Heathens may teach Chriſtians a proper leſſon; and even put to the bluſh, not only thoſe to whom the execution of the Law is committed, but likewiſe the Legiſlators themſelves. —The frequency of oaths, and the ſhamefully irreverent manner in which they are commonly adminiſtered to the people of this country, are greatly to be lamented. By theſe means oaths have loſt their proper effect; and perjury is become common, and very little thought of among many.—Although the ſage Epictetus admitted the neceſſity of an oath, he juſtly obſerved, That it ſhould never be recurred to, if it could poſſibly be avoided.—Other Pagan Philoſophers have maintained, That it was only lawful to ſwear for the ſafety of their country; for delivering their parents and friends from imminent dangers; or for ſupporting their character and reputation: But, as to worldly ſubſtance, they looked upon it as unworthy of an oath; and

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ſome of them have gone ſo far as to ſuffer the loſs of their effects rather than ſwear to them; as we are told a diſciple of Pythagoras did, who let his three talents go, ſooner than aſcertain their being his property by an oath.

Here we may likewiſe obſerve, That when we are lawfully called to give evidence upon oath we muſt do it without *equivocation*, or any mental reſervation whatever: for equivocation in theſe caſes is downright falſhood; and deſigned to impoſe on others, by making them believe what is really not true.—In thus trying to deceive men we ſhow the higheſt diſreſpect to Almighty God, whoſe ſacred name we uſe, for the purpoſe of giving a ſanction to treachery and deceit. It is therefore highly requiſite that the words uſed in an oath be clear and perſpicuous; and that thoſe who ſwear do underſtand them in the plain and literal ſenſe, in which they are commonly underſtood. If this is not always the caſe a door will be open to every ſpecies of villainy; and an oath will not be, what it was intended by God, "a termination of all ſtrife."

Let us therefore, my brethren, in giving evidence, in making promiſes and ſolemn engagements, always ſpeak and act as in the ſight of that omnipotent God who knows our hearts;

and whom no human artifice can poſſibly deceive.—In all things let us have a ſingle eye to the glory of God, to truth and juſtice among men. As a lying tongue is an abomination in the ſight of the Lord, let us abhor every falſe and wicked way; and as he is delighted with truth in the inward parts, let us be careful never to ſuffer our lips to utter any thing which our conſciences do not fully approve.—Let us be cautious as to what we promiſe, and in what we ſolemnly engage: but, having promiſed, let us faithfully perform; knowing that "better it is that thou ſhouldeſt not vow, than that thou ſhuoldeſt vow and not pay."* With David, let it be your conſtant prayer, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips. Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practiſe wicked works with men that work iniquity."†—Have always the higheſt veneration for that ſacred name, at which the moſt exalted Seraphs bow, with lowly reverence, and devils tremble in their dark abyſs.—Beſeech the Father of Mercies to preſerve you from being in the unhappy number of thoſe who ſeldom open their lips, but to offend him. Rather let your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth, than, by moving it, affront his divine

* Eccl. v. 5. † Pſal. cxli. 3, 4.

Majeſty,

Majeſty, as he hath denounced the ſevereſt judgments againſt thoſe who dare to take his name in vain: O beware of ſubjecting yourſelves unto them!—Stand in awe of his terrible threatenings, and ſin not.—Pray earneſtly for his Holy Spirit to imprint the truths of his word ſo deeply upon "the fleſhly tables of your heart," that nothing ſhall ever be able to obliterate them, or efface the impreſſion of them from your memory.—Let this be your daily petition, Lord, "cleanſe thou me from ſecret faults: keep back thy ſervant alſo from preſumptuous ſins; let them not have dominion over me; then ſhall I be upright; and I ſhall be innocent from the great tranſgreſſion. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy ſight, O Lord, my Strength, and my Redeemer."* Amen.

* Pſal. xix. 12, &c.

SERMON

SERMON XII.

SWEARING AND PROFANING OF GOD'S NAME FORBIDDEN.

MATTHEW V. 34, 37.

SWEAR NOT AT ALL;—BUT LET YOUR COMMUNICATION BE, YEA, YEA; NAY, NAY: FOR WHATSOEVER IS MORE THAN THESE COMETH OF EVIL.

HAVING, in the preceding Diſcourſe, opened the meaning of our Lord's words, by which all unlawful, all raſh and unneceſſary oaths are prohibited, we ſhall now, without further enlarging on that part of our ſubject, proceed to the SECOND and *principal* thing intended, namely,

II. To conſider the words of our Text as addreſſed to *common and habitual ſwearers*, who, in their ordinary converſation, are accuſtomed to profane and diſhonour the holy name of the moſt high God; and who, through the prevalence of an abominable habit, often ſwear, without being conſcious of what they are doing.

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By common and habitual ſwearers we mean ſuch as make mention of the *Name* of God, or any of his *Attributes*, as a bye-word, and to no good purpoſe; who uſe it raſhly, lightly, careleſsly, and only as expletives in their common converſation, without any regard to its honour, and its awful importance.

This abominable and ſinful practice muſt ariſe,—either from a fierce and ungovernable temper, which will not be kept within due bounds;—from an impious and profane ſpirit, that diſlikes and deſpiſes Religion;—from an unmanly levity of mind, which frequently incites men to ſpeak without properly thinking;—or, it may poſſibly proceed from an overbearing pride in ſome men, who know not how to bear with contradiction, and *will* be believed in whatever they ſay; not conſidering that herein they act like men who, fearing that their bare word will hardly be credited, endeavour to procure belief by their oaths.—In this their weakneſs is palpably diſcovered: for how can they imagine that they ſhall be credited even for their oaths ſake, when they are continually ſwearing, and alike for trifles or matters of importance?—Indeed, I cannot help being of opinion, That there is ſcarcely a more certain ſign of a perſon's want of veracity, than his having recourſe to oaths

oaths for the confirmation of what he aſſerts.—And I might add, That many fall into this ſin from a thoughtleſs, ſtupid, and ridiculous imitation of others, whoſe morals and manners ought to be held in the utmoſt deteſtation.——But whatever it ariſes from, one great cauſe, moſt certainly, is a want of fear and reverence for God and his Laws.

This claſs of daring and preſumptuous ſinners is numerous indeed. In all ranks and degrees of men, from the prince to the peaſant, even to the meaneſt wretch upon a dunghil, multitudes of ſwearing and blaſpheming miſcreants are to be found. One might reaſonably expect that our nobles and great men, even ſuppoſing them not to have the fear of God before their eyes, would, from a ſenſe of their dignity, and a becoming pride, diſdain to put themſelves on a level with the vileſt of God's rational creation, and practiſe, without ſhame, a vice which the moſt untutored infidels, the moſt low and illiterate wretches in the kingdom, can do with a better *grace*, if I may be allowed the expreſſion.—From thoſe brought up in ignorance, and accuſtomed to ſee nothing but vicious rudeneſs, what can be expected?—But ſurely we are to look for ſomething very different from men who fill the higheſt offices of truſt and power;—who

who are diſtinguiſhed by *titles* and *honours*:—who have had the means of acquiring polite literature, and a virtuous education. Such ought, by their upright conduct and pious example, to excite their inferiors to the love of God, and to the practice of what is good and praiſe-worthy among men. Verily, it is no wonder that the morals of the age are ſo corrupt and degenerate, among the *herd* of mankind, when ſo many among the *dignified ranks* in life, loſe ſight of their duty to their God, to themſelves, and to their fellow-creatures!—Would to God it were otherwiſe!—Not that I here mean to inſinuate, that *curſing*, and *ſwearing*, are the reigning and faſhionable vices of the preſent day, among our nobility and great men! I am happy to think they are not. God grant that they may never more diſgrace their characters.—But ſure I am, that there is foundation enough, and more than enough, for what I have now ſaid.

I cannot poſſibly conceive what excuſe any man can make for the heinous ſin of *common ſwearing*, let his rank and profeſſion in life be what it will: Nor can I find out what end or deſign he can have in it, unleſs it be that of ſhowing his *bravery*, and his *heroiſm*, by daring the moſt high God, and inſulting the Majeſty of Heaven.—For example;—Can military men, who

who generally excel in politeneſs and external accompliſhments, but among whom this impious crime is very prevalent;—can any of them be ſo weak as to imagine, that throwing out an oath, every now and then, conſtitutes any part of the character of a *gentleman?*—Or that it has the ſmalleſt tendency to prove him a man of courage and valour? One would hardly believe it.—Surely they ought to know, that, whatever accompliſhments they may have, this vice tarniſhes them all, in the judgment of every good man. Becauſe God delays to take vengeance on their impiety, they grow bolder in ſin, and challenge the Deity with more effrontery. Is this a *mark* of true heroiſm?—Is this a *teſt* of real honour?—Is it not rather an evident proof, that ſuch *bold* blaſphemers have no great opinion of their own honour; and that the world has ſtill leſs? Were it not ſo, why would they ſo commonly uſe an oath to confirm the truth of what they ſay?—A man of honour's word is enough at all times: and a perſon of credit will always be believed, on his ſimple affirmation; without being under the painful neceſſity of appealing to Heaven, for the truth of what he aſſerts. That man's credit and honour muſt be at a very low ebb, who finds it needful to call in the aid of oaths and imprecations,

tions, in order that he may be believed and truſted.

Here I cannot omit taking notice of an uſeful claſs of men, who, in many reſpects, do much credit to their country, but among whom this odious vice greatly prevails; I mean thoſe in the *ſeafaring* line:—men who ſee the wonders of the Lord in the deep waters; and who, of all others, ought to have the moſt lively and awful ſenſe of God's power and majeſty upon their minds: yet none, take them in general, are more thoughtleſs, or more addicted to profane ſwearing in their common converſation.—What pity it is, that this ſhould be the caſe!—But, bleſſed be God, they do not all come under this deſcription: nor are they all to be ranked among this impious claſs. There are many in the navy and merchant-ſervice, both commanders and common ſailors, who do honour to their profeſſion, who ſerve their God, their King, and their Country, with fidelity, and greatly deteſt the ſin againſt which we are inveighing:—And it is no ſmall pleaſure for us to reflect, That ſuch are among the number of our fellow-worſhippers. May their numbers increaſe;—may their good example have a powerful influence on all who behold it, in putting this horrible wickedneſs out of countenance, and out of practice!

It

It is really matter of grief, that among many, in this line of life, who are otherwiſe worthy and reſpectable characters, this vile habit of ſwearing ſhould be ſo common.—And it is no leſs ſtrange, than lamentable, that men ſhould voluntarily forfeit the high eſteem which the good and valuable part of mankind would have for them, by perſiſting in a practice which can profit them nothing!

I am well aware that ſome Commanders of ſhips will endeavour to plead in excuſe for this crime, "That they cannot maintain their authority on board, nor keep their ſailors to their duty, without ſwearing. This is certainly a *mere* pretence, and a very impotent excuſe; for we well know, that many Ship-maſters, who abhor this infamous vice, navigate their veſſels with as much ſafety, maintain as good order, and keep up as ſtrict diſcipline, on board, as thoſe do who practiſe it: and they aſſuredly have greater reaſon, than the latter, to expect that God will bleſs them, preſerve them from dangers, and proſper them in their voyages.—But, ſuppoſing that ſome ſailors do need to be driven to their duty, ſurely other means than thoſe of curſing and ſwearing may be uſed.—Habitual ſinners ought to conſider that what they uſe on the moſt trifling occaſions, cannot

be expected to prove efficacious in caſes of emergency and importance: and I verily believe, that if maſters would ſwear leſs, they would ſoon be convinced that ſervants would need it leſs.—After all, if ſwearing were really neceſſary on board, which I think few will dare, in conſcience, to aver, yet why bring it on ſhore; and not rather leave it on board, where it can hurt few, or none but ſuch as are already contaminated?

But what ſhall we ſay of thoſe low, vulgar, and profane wretches whom we daily meet with in the ſtreets; by whoſe execrable and blaſphemous language the pious ear is ſorely wounded; who, in defiance of all laws divine and human, revile the ſacred name of God, openly inſult the Majeſty of Heaven, mock at Religion, and call for damnation on their own, or their neighbour's ſoul? They ſeem to be ſo many demons broke looſe from the priſon of hell; ſo many infernal fiends come to earth, to give its inhabitants a ſpecimen of "the language of *Aſhdod*;" and a ſample of that converſation which ſhall eternally engage thoſe choſen ſervants of the Devil, in the dark regions of horror and deſpair.—And is it not wonderfully ſtrange that thoſe miniſters of ſin, thoſe agents for the Prince of Darkneſs, ſhould be ſo ſucceſsful

ceſsful in making proſelytes to their maſter?—One would think, that the very ſhock which their oaths and imprecations give to the ſoul, would beget ſuch an utter abhorrence of their ways, as would never be overcome.—But, alas! ſuch is the bewitching nature of ſin, that however deteſtable it may, at firſt ſight, appear, by cuſtom, it loſes its deformity; men become familiarized to it, and at laſt delight in it. How neceſſary then to flee at its firſt approach, to avoid it, to paſs from it, and turn away!

The neceſſity of ſhunning the very appearance of this ſin will be more evident, if we reflect on its horrible *nature* and its baneful *tendency*.

As to its *nature*, it is one of the moſt *malignant*, the moſt *daring* and *preſumptuous* ſins of which a man can poſſibly be guilty. This is manifeſt by the penalty denounced againſt thoſe who take the name of God in vain.—But, if we conſider *againſt whom* and *by whom* the offence is committed, there cannot remain a doubt.—The Lord JEHOVAH, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Sovereign of all worlds, and Governour of univerſal Nature, is *He* againſt whom the crime is perpetrated.—*Man*, the work of his hands, whoſe life and exiſtence is entirely in his power, and every moment at his diſpoſal, is the daring offender.—Strange, my brethren, that a

worm of the earth, who cannot draw one breath without divine permiſſion, ſhould ſet his mouth againſt the Heavens, and utter his blaſphemous ſpeeches againſt the Moſt High !—Have thoſe profane wretches no knowledge of God; no fear of the Almighty before their eyes; that they thus dare to pollute the ſacred name of that omnipotent Being, whoſe nod heaven and earth obey; and at whoſe frown the whole frame of Nature trembles, and is aſtoniſhed ?—Did the eternal God make himſelf known to men, by *names* and *titles*, for no other purpoſe but to be abuſed; or to fill up a *vacuum* in vain, idle, and contemptible converſation ?—Or does the preſumptuous ſinner think, that he looks big, and appears to be a man of conſequence, when he confirms every *negation* or *affirmation* by a profane oath ?—No; vain, thoughtleſs, and deſpicable wretch, it degrades thee below the brute beaſts, which contribute more to their Maker's praiſe than thou doeſt.—It makes thee reſemble thy father, the Devil, whoſe child thou art; and with whom thou ſhalt ſhare the bitter pangs of eternal torment; if divine Grace bring thee not to a ſpeedy and ſincere repentance.—May God in mercy give thee a ſight of thy ſins; and pluck thee as a brand out of the burning, before the flames of unquenchable fire rouſe thee from the

the lethargy of ſin; before that unhappy time come when repentance will not avail, and mercy ſhall be for ever fled!.

The horrible *nature* and the baneful *tendency* of this ſin will ſtill further appear in its being the high road to *atheiſm* and *infidelity*, to a contempt of God and every thing ſacred.—And no wonder: for if we can once imagine that the Almighty is ſuch an One, as ourſelves, and regardeth not our doings, we will ſoon come to make light of him; and at laſt, with the fool, will ſay in our hearts, "There is no God."*—This is one principal way by which the Devil deſtroys thouſands of precious ſouls. He leads them to deſtruction ſtep by ſtep; from thinking little of God, to an open profanation of his name, and finally to deny him altogether.—Believe it, my brethren, that ſwearing and profaning God's holy name is a ſure ſign of a *bad heart*; of a heart devoid of divine love and a reverential fear of the Lord: for he who poſſeſſes theſe will tremble at the very thought of taking his name in vain. It is alſo a ſure mark of ignorance and want of ſenſe: for who but the moſt ignorant, as well as wicked, will dare to commit this crying ſin?—Have we not found the greateſt and the wiſeſt men, in every age and country, the

* Pſal. xiv. 1.

moſt zealous for the honour of God's name?—Not to multiply examples, behold that great philoſopher, and moſt exact ſearcher into the works of nature, that this, or any other country ever produced, I mean *the honourable Robert Boyle*; who truly deſerved the *title*, by his being really an honour to this kingdom, both as a man, and as a Chriſtian. So great was his veneration for the name of God, that he never mentioned it, without making a pauſe, and a viſible ſtop in his diſcourſe. So ſacred and venerable was it held by this great man!—And ſhall the profane rabble, and the witlings of our day, think that ſwearing, and violating the name of God, give them ſome ſtate and importance? Silly creatures! Small muſt their importance indeed be, when they ſeek for it in a way which renders them obnoxious in the ſight of Heaven, and deſpicable in the eyes of all good men!

We are alſo told That Socrates had ſuch a veneration for the name of God, that he would never allow it to be pronounced, when ſpeaking of trifles.—The high prieſt of Jupiter was never permitted to ſwear, becauſe it was deemed derogatory to the honour of that falſe deity.—And ſhall Chriſtians, who are all prieſts of the moſt high and living God, dare to abuſe his ſacred and venerable name, without fear or remorſe?

morſe? Will not ſuch Heathens riſe up againſt all ſuch nominal Chriſtians, in the day of judgment, and condemn them?—And will it not then be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them?

Thoſe intrepid ſinners ought to conſider the danger which they frequently run of perjuring themſelves: for ſuch common ſwearers, without properly thinking on what they do, make no ſcruple to confirm with an oath, whatever they are ſaying, whether true or falſe. Well would it be for thoſe inconſiderate ſouls to attend to this ſalutary counſel of the wiſe ſon of Sirach, "Accuſtom not thy mouth to ſwearing: neither uſe thyſelf to the naming of the Holy One. For as a ſervant that is continually beaten, ſhall not be without a blue mark; ſo he that ſweareth and nameth God continually, ſhall not be faultleſs. A man that uſeth much ſwearing ſhall be filled with iniquity, and the plague ſhall never depart from his houſe: if he offend, his ſin ſhall be upon him: and if he acknowledge not his ſin, he maketh a double offence: and if he ſwear in vain, he ſhall not be innocent, but his houſe ſhall be full of calamities."*

But if thoſe profane ſinners have no regard

* Eccleſiaſticus xxiii. 9, 10, 11.

for *God*, yet they ought to have ſome reſpect for the *company* they are in; more eſpecially, when they know that they are not all ſwearers like themſelves. Many, who are addicted to this ſin, pretend to a very high degree of politeneſs and refinement in their behaviour: but, alas, for the manner of their ſhowing it! They ought to conſider that ſwearing, or taking the name of God in vain, can never be counted a mark of politeneſs, or a proof of ſuperior refinement. On the contrary, it argues a mean, a vulgar and untutored mind: for a greater incivility, or a higher inſult, cannot be offered to any company, who call themſelves *Chriſtians*. And I have often been ſurprized how *women*, maintaining fair and virtuous characters, and ſome even profeſſing godlineſs, can ſit in the company of ſuch men, without ſhowing them that contempt which they merit; and manifeſting their abhorrence of their impious conduct.—Would the fair ſex do themſelves ſo much honour, and God ſo much reverence, as to ſhun the company of profane ſwearers, and take every opportunity to teſtify their diſapprobation of ſuch behaviour, this heinous ſin would not be ſo faſhionable, nor ſo much practiſed as it now is.—One reproof from the lips, and ſeconded by the conduct, of an amiable and virtuous

woman,

woman, would have more weight, and a greater effect on ſuch characters, than a thouſand from a Miniſter of the Goſpel, to whoſe ſermons and admonitions they will not attend; and whoſe office they frequently deſpiſe. But while the gentle, the beautiful and engaging part of God's rational creation, inſtead of ſpeaking or acting for their Creator, often ſhow the greateſt reſpect and partiality for thoſe who do him the greateſt diſhonour, what hopes of reformation can we reaſonably entertain?—But the ſcene will ſoon be awfully changed! Whatever encouragement ſwearers may receive from the improper behaviour of the fair ſex, and however regardleſs they may be of the admonitions of Goſpel Miniſters, the time is faſt coming, the day is haſtening on apace, when God will vindicate his own cauſe; and pour down the fury of his wrath upon the devoted heads of thoſe daring ſinners who inſult his Godhead, by profaning his ſacred name.

What makes this ſin the more criminal, and the more inexcuſable, is, That there is no temptation to it, and that it is accompanied with neither *profit* nor *pleaſure*.—The breach of all, or moſt of the other commandments, may be attended with ſome preſent advantage, or gratification; but this with none, that I can conceive.

conceive. The *thief*, when he ſteals, may reap ſome temporary profit from his unlawful acquiſitions.—The *liar* may gain ſome end or purpoſe by his falſhood and deceit.——The *drunkard* has pleaſure over his cups, and enjoys what he calls *Life* among his jovial companions. —The *fornicator*, in his ſenſual purſuits, finds ſome gratification to his beaſtly appetite:—But, with reſpect to the *ſwearer*,—we may aſk where is his gain? whence his pleaſure? He, doubtleſs, appears more diſintereſted than other ſinners.—He is a *volunteer* in the Devil's ſervice; and does duty for him without fee or reward, in the preſent life; but he will moſt certainly meet with a reward, proportionate to his loyalty, in the life to come.——The profane ſwearer and blaſphemer, who have ſo willing and cheerfully ſerved the Prince of Darkneſs, have the beſt right to a place near him; and to a principal ſhare in the awful horrors, and piercing anguiſh of his infernal kingdom. In this ſin the Devil deals not with us as in others. In the latter he offers us ſomething in exchange for our ſouls: but in committing the former, we give them up to him, without getting any thing whatever in return. This one of our Poets obſerves in the following lines:

"Take

" Take not his name, who made thy mouth, in vain;
" It gets thee nothing, and hath no excuſe:
" Luſt and wine plead a pleaſure; Avarice a gain:
" But the cheap ſwearer, through his open ſluice,
" Lets his ſoul run for naught."*

Before I finiſh this Diſcourſe, I think it neceſſary to take notice of ſome people who accuſtom themſelves, in their ordinary converſation, to the making of raſh and unneceſſary exclamations, ſuch as, *Good God!*—*O Lord!*—*Bleſs my ſoul*, &c.! not conſidering that in the irreverent uſe of theſe expreſſions, they diſhonour the Almighty, and take his name in vain.—I might alſo mention others who ſwear by their *faith*, their *conſcience*, their *ſoul*, and the like, without thinking that they are guilty of a crime. Such perſons ought however to conſider, That they are juſt in the ſame predicament with the Phariſees of old, who, when they ſwore by *Heaven*, by the *Earth*, and by *Jeruſalem*, imagined that they were not guilty of violating God's Law; whilſt, as our bleſſed Lord gave them to underſtand, they were ſwearing by God himſelf: for Heaven was his throne, the Earth his footſtool, and Jeruſalem his holy city.—In like manner, thoſe who ſwear by their ſoul, by their faith, and by their conſcience,

* Herbert.

ſwear

ſwear by God himſelf; in as much as the *ſoul* is an emanation from God, and the image of the Deity;—as it is by *faith* that we believe in God;—and as the *conſcience* is God's Vicegerent and Judge in man's heart. Nor can we ſwear by any thing elſe which has not ſome connexion with, and ſome relation to God. There is much more ſin in theſe practices than men are generally aware of: therefore, we ought to keep at the greateſt diſtance from them, and carefully avoid every thing that may have a tendency to lead us to the commiſſion of this grievous and inexcuſable crime.

That thoſe who, by the grace of God, have hitherto been kept back from this preſumptuous and deteſtable ſin, may be ſtill more fortified againſt it; and that thoſe who have been guilty thereof, may be awakened to a proper ſenſe of their danger, may be excited to break it off immediately, and, by a ſincere repentance, fly to God for mercy to pardon, and grace to help, while yet he will be intreated of them;—let them ſeriouſly attend to the few following exhortations, and earneſtly endeavour to put them into daily practice.—And,

1ſt. Be often employed in meditating on the awful greatneſs, the infinite majeſty, the unbounded power, and the unfathomable wiſdom

of

of that glorious BEING, whoſe all-ſeeing eye is ever upon you, whoſe ear is always open, and hears the moſt ſecret whiſpers of the ſoul; who knows even your moſt private thoughts, and will one day be your ſtrict and impartial Judge. —This will be a great mean of begetting in you that profound reſpect and reverence, which creatures owe to their Creator. It will make you careful to ſet a watch before your mouth, and to keep the door of your lips, leſt at any time you ſhould raſhly offend. Yea, it will give you ſuch ideas of God, and his divine Attributes, as will make you dread the very thought of taking his name in vain.

2d. Let ſuch as are accuſtomed to this heinous ſin of profane ſwearing, carefully examine into the cauſes of it; and try to find out what it is that leads them to its commiſſion!—Is it wine and ſtrong drink? then let them ſpeedily forſake the haunts of riot and intemperance; and "live ſoberly, righteouſly and godly."—Is it from hatred and wrath? then let them exert every power to conquer theſe boiſterous paſſions; "to put away all anger and wrath, malice, blaſphemy, and filthy communication out of their mouth;" and to "put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering; forbearing

forbearing one another, and forgiving one another,—even as Chriſt forgave you."—Or, is it the baleful example of others, and the infectious company of the ungodly, that lead you to the commiſſion of this ſin?—Then fail not to break off immediately, all intercourſe with ſuch men. Shun their company and converſation:—and when tempted to join in their iniquitous practices, ſay to them, as David did, "I am purpoſed that my mouth ſhall not tranſgreſs."*—"Depart from me, ye evil doers; for I will keep the commandments of my God."†

3d. In order to preſerve you from the accurſed habit of taking the Almighty's name in vain, let me perſuade you to be exceeding cautious in making uſe of any ſtrong aſſeverations.—"Let your communication be yea, yea; and nay, nay; for whatſoever is more than theſe, cometh of evil;" of an evil habit, or of ſome evil principle that muſt be got rid of; or rather, of the Devil himſelf, that evil ſpirit that worketh powerfully in the children of diſobedience; who is continually going about oppoſing God, and ſeeking the deſtruction of mankind.

4th. Let the grateful remembrance of God's mercy, which he has graciouſly manifeſted, in ſparing you ſo long in the land of the living,

* Pſal. xvii. 3. † Pſal. cxix. 115.

and

and in conferring upon you many unmerited favours, lead you to a ſenſe of your duty, and of the obligations you are under to fear him, to love him, and to glorify his ſacred name.

Were it poſſible to plead any excuſe for ſinners of this ſtamp, it would be for the groſsly ignorant and uninſtructed part of the human race; who are, in ſome things, little ſuperior to the beaſts that periſh. But what can we ſay for thoſe who have been inſtructed in the knowledge of God, and of Jeſus Chriſt, whom he hath ſent to redeem a guilty world from death, and who, nevertheleſs, dare to throw out their curſes and blaſphemies againſt him and his religion? What horrible monſters, to lift up the heel againſt God who made them; and to bite the hand that is ſupporting them, ſupplying their wants, and preſerving them in exiſtence! —Under the Law of Moſes, all blaſphemers of God's name were ſtoned to death: and ſuch as heard them ſhut their ears, and rent their garments.—In the Laws of the Emperor Juſtinian, it was enacted, That all blaſphemers ſhould be put to death; in order to prevent the cities and ſtates from being infected with their impiety.—We alſo have wholeſome laws againſt ſuch:—But what ſignify laws when not put in execution? nay, when they are ſet at open defiance?

Laſt,

Laſt. If the goodneſs of God does not lead to repentance, if bold blaſphemers dread not the puniſhment which Heaven, and the laws of their country, ſometimes inflict on them, in this life, let them tremble at the thought of that dreadful and everlaſting puniſhment which moſt aſſuredly awaits them, in the world to come. A timely fear now may produce the moſt happy effects hereafter.—However little you may think of the matter, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." He has expreſsly declared, That "if thou wilt not obſerve—to fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful."*—Shall this dreadful threatning have no effect in turning thee, O ſinner, from the moſt daring and preſumptuous of all ſins? Shall it not prevent thee from ſtretching forth the hand againſt God, and impiouſly running upon the thick boſſes of the Almighty's bucklers? He hath declared, That "he will render vengeance to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him? He will ſpeak to them in wrath, and vex them in his ſore diſpleaſure." Againſt ſuch "a fire is kindled in his anger, and ſhall burn unto the loweſt hell."

* Deut. xxviii. 58, 59.

But

But, perhaps, you think that the *curſe of God* has as little meaning, and is as feeble and impotent as your own: or you may be ſo accuſtomed to the *phraſe* that you mind it not.——Can you ſeriouſly think, or poſſibly believe, that God is not in earneſt, when he threatens profane ſwearers and blaſphemers of his holy name?—And do you imagine that, when you are calling for damnation on yourſelves or others, you offer no affront to the Majeſty of Heaven? nor do any injury to your own ſouls?——You are mightily deceived if you do.—Did you ever conſider what *damnation* means? Attend to it a little. Is eternal baniſhment from the face of God, in whoſe preſence there is fulneſs of joy, and at whoſe right hand there are immortal pleaſures, a thing to be deſired?—Is a dwelling "amidſt devouring flames and everlaſting burnings," a ſituation to be wiſhed for?—Are the horrid ſhrieks, and hideous yellings of devils and damned ſpirits—are the horrors and "blackneſs of darkneſs," brimſtone and ſmoke,—with the conſtant gnawing of the worm that never dies, things pleaſant, and to be ſought after?—If they are not, what muſt the madneſs of that unthinking wretch be who, daily and hourly, damns his ſoul!—For all theſe, and a thouſand horrors, beſides theſe, are comprehended in the

word *Damnation!*—Fooliſh man! knoweſt thou not, That although thy curſes cannot hurt another, they will ſurely wound thee? And that thou ſhalt by no means eſcape the righteous judgment of God?

One would hardly think it poſſible for men to be at ſo much pains to impoſe upon themſelves, as ſome really are; who, in order to ſoothe the upbraidings of conſcience, and put the evil day far off, try to perſuade themſelves, contrary to *reaſon*, as well as *revelation*, that there is no place of puniſhment for the wicked in a future ſtate; and, when threatened therewith, will perhaps aſk me, ſcornfully, which has indeed been the caſe, "Where is hell?"—If there are any ſuch preſumptuous ſcoffers here preſent, let me aſk them, in return; "Againſt whom do ye ſport yourſelves? Againſt whom make ye a wide mouth, and draw out the tongue? Are ye not children of tranſgreſſion, a ſeed of falſhood?"—"Whom haſt thou reproached and blaſphemed? And againſt whom haſt thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even againſt the Holy One of Iſrael."—Alas, unhappy ſouls! ſoon ſhall you know *where* and *what* it is, to your woful experience, if you do not ſpeedily repent, and turn from your iniquity.—Henceforth, "talk

no

no more ſo exceedingly proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed."

Have pity on yourſelves, O infatuated ſinners, and, for the Lord's ſake, for your precious ſouls' ſake, give up this horrible ſin, and make haſte to flee from the wrath to come. God only knows what time may be allowed you for this ſalutary purpoſe. Who can tell but that the juſtice of God may give death a charge to arreſt you, in the moment when your mouths are filled with oaths and imprecations? We have heard of many inſtances of this kind: And why not you, as well as others?—Would the boldeſt of you wiſh to be thus ſeized?—to be thus taken, curſing and blaſpheming that omnipotent JEHOVAH, in whoſe preſence you muſt immediately appear; and from which you muſt be driven into the diſmal regions of eternal deſpair, intolerable pain, and never-ceaſing anguiſh;—where, with tormenting and tormented devils, and the motley crew whom you choſe to imitate and aſſociate with upon earth, you ſhall roar, curſe and blaſpheme for ever?—If not, ceaſe to do evil; and by a timely and ſincere repentance, turn to God through Chriſt Jeſus, while he is yet willing to pardon and receive

you.—By humble and fervent prayer confeſs your ſins, cry for mercy, and, by a true faith, apply to "the blood of ſprinkling," that your iniquities may therewith be waſhed away, and your ſouls delivered from eternal ruin.—Henceforth, "ſanctify the Lord of hoſts himſelf; and let him be your fear; and let him be your dread." Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XIII.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH AND SANCTUARY.

LEVITICUS xix. 30.

YE SHALL KEEP MY SABBATHS, AND REVERENCE MY SANCTUARY: I AM THE LORD.

UNDER the Levitical Diſpenſation, no commandment was more ſtrictly obſerved than that for ſanctifying the Sabbath: nor were greater bleſſings annexed to any of the divine precepts.—This injunction, for keeping one whole day in ſeven holy to the Lord, is coeval with the Creation itſelf.—Six days did God employ in creating the Univerſe, in gathering together the waters of the ſeas, in garniſhing the heavens, in adorning and beautifying the earth, making them fit and delectable habitations for the ſcaly nations, the feathered race, the beſtial tribes, and chiefly for man, whom he formed after his own image, and conſtituted Lord of this lower world.

Having finiſhed this fair Creation, and pronounced it *Good*, God reſted, on the ſeventh day, from all his labours; "and he bleſſed and ſanctified it; becauſe that in it he had reſted from all his work which God created and made."* For the ſanctifying of this day we have a ſpecial commandment, given us in the firſt table of the Decalogue, in theſe words; "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days ſhalt thou labour and do all thy work: but the ſeventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou ſhalt not do any work, thou, nor thy ſon, nor thy daughter, nor thy man-ſervant, nor thy maid-ſervant, nor thy cattle, nor thy ſtranger that is within thy gates: For in ſix days the Lord made heaven and earth, the ſea, and all that in them is, and reſted the ſeventh day: wherefore the Lord bleſſed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it."†—This was the origin of the Sabbath; and was appointed, by God, to keep up the memory of the great work of Creation; to be a day of reſt for man, and for beaſt; and to be peculiarly appropriated to the worſhip and ſervice of God.

In conſequence of this appointment, the Hebrews afterwards, by the order of Heaven, ſanctified and ſet apart the Sabbath, or "day of

* Gen. ii. 3. † Exod. xx. 8, &c.

reſt,"

reſt," as the original word imports.—On it they refrained from all labour and ſecular employment; and devoted themſelves to the ſervice of the Sanctuary, to reading and ſtudying the Law, and to prayer.

This duty is both of a *moral* and a *ceremonial* nature. The ceremonial part is, doubtleſs, done away with the ceremonial Law; but the moral obligation thereof is ſtill in force; and as binding on us as it was on the ancient Iſraelites.—True, the rigorous obſervance of the Jewiſh Sabbath is mitigated under the Chriſtian Diſpenſation: its burthenſome ceremonies are removed; ſo that, inſtead of being a labour and a toil, it is to every ſoul who delighteth in communion with God, a joy and a pleaſure. He regards it as the "holy of the Lord, and honourable:" and he rejoices at its weekly return.

In the ſequel of this Diſcourſe, I propoſe,—FIRST, To make a few Obſervations on the *Change* from the Jewiſh to the Chriſtian Sabbath; or from the *ſeventh* to the *firſt* day of the week.—SECONDLY, To ſhow you the *neceſſity* of a Sabbath, or one whole day in ſeven, to be ſet apart from worldly employments, for religious purpoſes.—THIRDLY, To point out ſome of the moſt eſſential of thoſe *Duties* which it is incumbent on us to obſerve on that holy day;—

LASTLY, To conclude with *ſome Improvement* of our ſubject.

And may God enable us both to know and to do his will; and ſo to ſpend our Sabbaths on earth, as that we may thereby be fitted for the enjoyment of that eternal Sabbath of reſt and pleaſure, which awaits the redeemed of the Lord in his heavenly kingdom.

I. We are to make a few obſervations on the *Change* from the Jewiſh to the Chriſtian Sabbath; or from the *ſeventh* to the *firſt* day of the week.

That we are bound, by the *moral Law*, to keep one whole day in ſeven holy unto the Lord is incontrovertible: and that the *ſeventh* day of the week, from the beginning of the world to the reſurrection of Chriſt, was appointed and conſecrated for that purpoſe, is beyond a diſpute.—But ever ſince that happy era, when the Legal Economy gave way to one founded on better promiſes; when old things were done away, and all things became new; the Sabbath has been changed from the *ſeventh* to the *firſt* day of the week; and ſo it ſhall continue to the end of the world. Nor did this change, in the ſmalleſt degree, prejudice the firſt appointment; nor in the leaſt infringe on the fourth Commandment,

Commandment; for all that is *moral* therein remains inviolate: and being, by its firſt inſtitution, only a temporary law, it might, of conſequence, be changed for another and a better.

Nor *might* the *ſeventh* day Sabbath, under the Law, be only changed for another, under the Goſpel, but it was even *neceſſary* that ſuch a change ſhould take place. For if the ages before Chriſt, and thoſe after him, may, agreeable to the Scriptures, be conſidered as two diſtinct worlds; and if the Redemption purchaſed by him was the making of the one, as God's creation was of the other, then, with good reaſon, might the Sabbath be changed from the ſeventh to the firſt day of the week, in commemoration of the world's being renewed by *redemption*; a work no leſs arduous and glorious, than the forming of this ſpacious Univerſe from nothing. —Were the world of Grace a work but equally calculated to promote the glory of its gracious Author, and equally able to advance the happineſs of mankind, then, why might not the reſt of the new world be kept, on the firſt day of the week, in commemoration of the new creation?—But if redemption be a work ſtill more wonderful, ſtill more for the glory of God, and infinitely more for the happineſs of all the ſubjects of Chriſt's kingdom,—and if on that day the

the great Mediator perfected the ſalvation of his people, and reſted from all his toils, having burſt the bands of death aſunder, triumphed over principalities and powers, ranſomed us miſerable captives from the cruel bondage of Satan, brought us forth from the dungeon of deſpair, and exalted us to the dignity of kings and prieſts, ſurely we have greater reaſon to keep this day ſacred than any other; and gratefully to acknowledge the propriety of the change.

As to the preciſe time when this change took place, and which was the firſt particular day that was ſanctified, we do not exactly know: nor are we informed whether Chriſt himſelf immediately inſtituted it, or did it by his Apoſtles. As to this, it is of little, or no conſequence: But it is probable that our Lord himſelf, after his reſurrection, and during the time in which "he taught his diſciples the things concerning the kingdom of God," did command and appoint it; or that he inſpired his Apoſtles to obſerve it from that time forth. This is evident both from *their* practice, and that of the *primitive Chriſtians*. They, neither by their example, nor by their command, made choice of the ſeventh day for their meeting together in ſolemn worſhip; nor did they give it the title of "The Lord's-day."

There

There is no doubt but that, in compliance with the Jews, they, for a ſeaſon, obſerved the ſeventh day, to a certain degree; as they did the day of Pentecoſt, and ſome others; becauſe, on thoſe days the multitude were more conveniently gathered together.—This, with ſome few of the Levitical rites and ceremonies, the Chriſtian Jews obſerved until they were fully ſatisfied of their abolition.—But in all Chriſtian Churches, among the Gentiles, we never hear of the *ſeventh*, but always of the *firſt* day of the week, being kept holy unto the Lord. It was on this day, "when the diſciples were aſſembled," that Chriſt made his firſt appearance to them, after he aroſe from the dead.*—It was alſo on the firſt day of the week that the Holy Ghoſt was poured down upon the Apoſtles; which was an evident token of God's countenancing their meeting together for his worſhip on that day.—And we are elſewhere told that, "Upon the firſt day of the week, when the diſciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them."†—Whence it is clear, that this meeting together was for publick worſhip; as the breaking of bread, or diſpenſing the Sacrament, and preaching do intimate.—And it was on this day that "the Son of Man" ap-

* Jo. xx. 19, 26. † Acts xx. 7.

peared

peared to his favourite diſciple, in the iſle of Patmos, and gave him a glorious revelation of future events.—Thus, from the conſideration of that glorious event which the Chriſtian Sabbath is deſigned to commemorate;—from the practice of the Apoſtles and primitive Chriſtians;—from the ſignal marks of God's favour and approbation ſhowed to his diſciples and followers on that day;—as well as from other reaſons, we are led to conclude, That the Sabbath was changed from the *ſeventh* to the *firſt* day of the week, by a divine appointment.

Having thus made a few obſervations on the change from the *Jewiſh* to the *Chriſtian* Sabbath; or from the *ſeventh* to the *firſt* day of the week, I ſhall now, as propoſed in the SECOND place,

II. Show you the *neceſſity* of a Sabbath, or one whole day in ſeven, to be ſet apart for a day of reſt from worldly employments, and devoted to religious purpoſes.—And,

1ſt. The *neceſſity* of a Sabbath, or day of reſt, will appear evident, if we only conſider the *nature* and *conſtitution* of man and of beaſt.—Man was, doubtleſs, deſigned for a life of activity. His frame requires exerciſe to ſtrengthen it, and render it healthy.—Sloth and inactivity naturally

turally bring on languors and diſeaſes, both of body and mind, to which the buſy world are utterly ſtrangers. Nevertheleſs, men may err on the one ſide as much as on the other. Continued and uninterrupted toil waſtes and wears out the conſtitution; and ſoon renders it unfit for the buſineſs of life.—Our all-wiſe Creator, well knowing our frailty, and ever careful to provide for our happineſs, has been graciouſly pleaſed to ſet apart one whole day in ſeven, for a day of ſacred reſt, by which the weary limbs, and the exhauſted faculties, may recover their proper tone, and gather ſtrength to renew the labours of another week. This is a moſt kind and beneficial inſtitution of Divine Providence in man's behalf, even in this reſpect.—Perhaps, ſome of you, whom a good God has placed above the neceſſity of labouring for your bread with the ſweat of your brows, may not know the pleaſure there is in reſting one day in ſeven from hard labour; at leaſt you cannot reliſh it in ſo high a degree.—But aſk the reaper, for example, who, during the week, has borne the toils and heat of the day, whoſe glowing hands and aching back call for eaſe and refreſhment; aſk him how much he longs for the returning weekly reſt. Ah, how grateful! The very proſpect of

of its return helps to keep up his ſpirits, and tends to alleviate the preſſure of his toils.

The Father of Mercies, who ceaſes not to conſult the happineſs of his creatures, ſeeing that the heart of man, in his lapſed ſtate, was ſo attached to the world, and his affections ſo ſet upon its profits and pleaſures, did not think it good to leave him to chooſe what portion of his time he ſhould dedicate to the ſervice of his Creator. Had man been left to his own free will in this matter, it is more than probable that his avaricious ſoul, in place of ſetting apart one whole day in ſeven, for divine worſhip, would have grudged one day in ſeven weeks, perhaps in ſeven months, nay, in ſeven years: and in purſuit of his worldly enjoyments drudged away his whole time, his own life, and the life of the irrational creatures under his power. To prevent this God graciouſly, and expreſsly, enjoined the ſtrict obſervation of one day in ſeven, for reſting from all worldy labours and paſtimes; but to be occupied in preparing, and providing for eternity; and that, whilſt the rational creature enjoyed a *ſpiritual reſt* for the ſoul, the irrational creature might enjoy *natural reſt* for the body.

This reſt of the Sabbath is no leſs neceſſary, nor

nor leſs beneficial to our cattle and beaſts of burthen than to ourſelves.—Theſe were given by God to aſſiſt man in his labours; and alſo to contribute to his eaſe and pleaſure: and, being a part of God's creation, ought to be treated with gentleneſs and humanity. Yea, the ſovereign and univerſal Lord, who regardeth even the meaneſt of his creatures, has given an expreſs command, that they likewiſe ſhould enjoy the Sabbath as a day of reſt.—And I may venture to ſay, That the perſon who is cruel and inhuman to the dumb animal which helps to provide for both his pleaſure and his ſuſtenance, will never ſenſibly feel for his brethren of mankind. "The merciful man," ſays Solomon, "regardeth the life of his beaſt." Nor would I ſeek for a greater ſign of a man's barbarity, and the viciouſneſs of his heart, than cruelty and oppreſſion to his cattle.—Thus far, in a *civil* ſenſe, we may ſee the neceſſity of a Sabbath, or weekly day of reſt, for man, and for beaſt.—But,

2dly. For nobler ends, and ſtill higher purpoſes, we may ſee the *neceſſity* of keeping one day in ſeven as a day of ſacred reſt, and conſecrated to the Lord.

The Sabbath was particularly deſigned to keep up the worſhip, or ſervice, of the true God, which

which is the foundation of all morality.—And, in order to worſhip him aright, it is neceſſary to have a proper notion of his Nature and Attributes. For the acquiring of this divine knowledge the reading and preaching of the holy Oracles are appointed. And leſt we ſhould neglect to ſeek after this heavenly wiſdom, there is an expreſs command given, in our Text, to regard and honour both the *time* and the *place* appropriated to this purpoſe: "Ye ſhall keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my Sanctuary: I am the Lord."—The hallowing of the Sabbath was a great mean of preventing the Iſraelites from falling into the vile idolatry, the ſuperſtitions and immoralities of the Heathen nations around them. God's Sanctuary was to be reverenced; and his worſhippers were to approach thereto with decency, purity, and humility; with a ſolemn awe, and a ſacred delight; rejoicing, like David, when it was ſaid to them, "Let us go into the houſe of the Lord."—— And, although we have now no ſolemn feaſts appointed, nor any one particular place made more holy than another, by divine inſtitution, as the Tabernacle and the Temple then were, yet we are hereby bound and obliged to reſpect the ſolemn Aſſemblies of Chriſtians met together for religious purpoſes; and therein to behave

behave with a due decorum. We are to attend the performance of divine ſervice with ſerioufneſs and attention, as in the preſence of God, who has promiſed to be graciouſly preſent in the worſhipping congregations of his people.

How unlike to this is the conduct of many who go to the houſe of God with no other view than to ſee and be ſeen; to get ſomething which may furniſh them with matter for laughter and ridicule, or for a little idle and trifling converſation afterwards; diſturbing the audience, and taking off their ſerious attention from things of the greateſt importance, by their indecent carriage and unbecoming behaviour.—Is this the proper way of *keeping* the Sabbath, and of *reverencing* God's Sanctuary?—May the Lord, in mercy, convince all ſuch of their folly, work a change upon their heart, and bring them to that godly ſorrow for ſin, that worketh repentance not to be repented of.

If a man ſeriouſly reads his Bible, he will ſee that the *ſecond* and *fourth* commandments are particularly connected, and their obſervance eſpecially enjoined: and with great propriety; for as nothing tends more to corrupt Religion, and deſtroy its power, than the uſe of images in devotion; ſo nothing contributes more to keep up its true ſpirit and efficacy than keeping holy

the Sabbath, and reverencing the Sanctuary.—By theſe the eſſentials of Religion are preſerved; and therein much of its inſtrumental part conſiſts.—As a proof this, we find the Prophets reproving and threatening the Jews, for no ſin ſo often, and ſo ſeverely, as *idolatry* and *profanation* of the Sabbath.—And let me tell you, my brethren, That, although the whole of Religion conſiſts not in ſanctifying the Sabbath-day, there certainly is little, or no Religion without it. This you may all, from experience, be convinced of. Do but carefully obſerve a man who pays no regard to the Lord's-day, and habitually neglects to aſſemble with the worſhippers of God; and you will find him void of moſt, if not of all the other principles, as well as the practice of Religion.—Indeed, the importance of this duty is ſo great, that, according as it is performed or neglected, the intereſt of Religion flouriſhes or decays.—All the other commandments of the Law, in ſome meaſure hang upon this; and the obedience given to them is, generally, in proportion as this day is hallowed and employed in religious exerciſes.—It is, as it were, the very life and ſpirit of the other days. When men are cold and languid on it, ſo will they be through the reſt of the week: and by this we may judge of the ſtate and frame

of

of our ſouls, in regard to God and divine things. By keeping holy the Sabbath, our love and reſpect for Chriſt, and his Ordinances, are beſt proved and atteſted. For, if we delight more in his company than in that of the world, and deſire communion with him more than with all created excellence, we will ſanctify his day, we will approach his altar with joy, and join in the ſweet ſociety of them who keep holy-day.

Conſider, my brethren, the reaſonableneſs of the demand. God requires only *one* day out of *ſeven* for himſelf; and ſhall we deny to give it? He has an undoubted right to all our time; yet he graciouſly gives us *ſix* days for ourſelves, and aſks but one for himſelf: and ſhall we think him exorbitant in his demand?—It was the love and mercy of our Creator, it was a kind regard to our weakneſs and neceſſities, which cauſed him to inſtitute this day, whereon we may have the ſpecial privilege of acceſs to God, and of holding communion with him: and ſurely, on this day, our love and gratitude to him ought to flow out more abundantly. To neglect the duties of the Lord's-day is cruelty to ourſelves: for the ſanctifying of the Sabbath is joined with the greateſt bleſſings, with the richeſt and moſt precious promiſes; all of which we forfeit by the omiſſion,

or careleſs performance, of the duties required of us on that holy day.—" Bleſſed is the man," ſaith God, " that doeth this, and the ſon of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.—Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my houſe of prayer: their burnt-offerings, and their ſacrifices ſhall be accepted upon mine altar: for mine houſe ſhall be called an Houſe of prayer for all people."*—Again, " If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleaſure on my holy day; and call the Sabbath a Delight, the holy of the Lord Honourable; and ſhalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleaſure, nor ſpeaking thine own words: then ſhalt thou delight thyſelf in the Lord; and I will cauſe thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath ſpoken it."†—— Theſe, and many other bleſſings of a ſimilar nature, are promiſed, in the Scriptures of Truth, to all ſuch as hallow the Sabbath-day and ſanctify it.

On the other hand, the moſt awful threatenings, and the ſevereſt curſes, are denounced

* Iſa. lvi. 2, 7. † Iſa. lviii. 13, 14.

againſt

againſt the profaners of this ſacred day.—Attend to the command which God gave to Moſes, in theſe words, "Speak thou alſo unto the children of Iſrael, ſaying, Verily, my Sabbaths ye ſhall keep, for it is a ſign between me and you, throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the Lord that doth ſanctify you. Ye ſhall keep the Sabbath therefore, for it is holy unto you: Every one that defileth it ſhall ſurely be put to death: For whoſoever doeth any work therein, that ſoul ſhall be cut off from among his people. Six days may work be done, but in the ſeventh is the Sabbath of reſt, holy to the Lord: whoſoever doeth any work in the Sabbath-day, he ſhall ſurely be put to death. Wherefore the children of Iſrael ſhall keep the Sabbath, to obſerve the Sabbath, throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant."*——"Six days thou ſhalt do thy work, and on the ſeventh day thou ſhalt reſt, that thine ox, and thine aſs may reſt, and the ſon of thy handmaid, and the ſtranger may be refreſhed."†

In later times God renewed his commands, together with his threatenings, to his people of Iſrael, by his ſervants the Prophets; and particularly by Jeremiah, in this ſolemn charge;

* Exod. xxxi. 13, &c. † Exod. xxiii. 12.

"Thus ſaith the Lord, Take heed to your-ſelves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath-day; nor bring it in by the gates of Jeruſalem; neither carry forth a burden out of you houſes on the Sabbath-day; neither do ye any work, but hallow ye the Sabbath-day, as I commanded your fathers.—But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath-day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jeruſalem on the Sabbath-day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it ſhall devour the palaces of Jeruſalem, and it ſhall not be quenched."*—We find the Prophet Ezekiel introducing the Almighty as thus regreting the unthankfulneſs of Iſrael; "Moreover alſo I gave them my Sabbaths to be a ſign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord that ſanctify them. But the houſe of Iſrael rebelled againſt me in the wilderneſs; they walked not in my ſtatutes, and they deſpiſed my judgments, which if a man do, he ſhall even live in them; and my Sabbaths they greatly polluted. Then I ſaid, I would pour out my fury upon them, in the wilderneſs, to conſume them."†—Indeed it is apparent, That, through the whole of the Levitical Diſpenſation, the Sabbath-day was conſidered among the

* Chap. xvii. 21, &c. † Chap. xx. 12, 13.

devout

devout Iſraelites, as one of their moſt ſacred and valuable privileges.

Nor did the firſt Chriſtian Churches hold the Lord's-day in leſs eſteem. They rejoiced at its weekly approach; and gladly welcomed in the day on which their divine Saviour roſe from the dead, and fully completed the glorious work of their redemption. They were delighted in the very thought of joining with Chriſt's friends and followers, in celebrating his matchleſs love to dying man, in ſinging the praiſes of their God, in preſenting their joint ſupplications at a Throne of Grace, and in hearing the everlaſting Goſpel of peace, which only can make wiſe unto ſalvation, preached unto them.

In a word, the Sabbath, rightly ſpent, is a great mean of our growing in grace, and our increaſing in holineſs; of bringing us nearer to God, and of making us more reſemble him. Therefore, the man that deſpiſes the Lord's-day, and neglects to ſanctify it, not only ſinneth againſt God, but "wrongeth his own ſoul."—Beware, Chriſtians, that none of you be found among the unhappy number of ſuch deſpiſers; leſt, with them, you one day wonder and periſh.—But rather, by a conſcientious diſcharge of every duty incumbent upon you, ho-

nour the commandments of your God; and ſo ſanctify his Sabbaths, that you may thereby be fitted for the enjoyment of that Sabbath of everlaſting reſt, which awaits his faithful worſhippers in the heavenly Canaan.

May the God of Abraham, Iſaac, and of Iſrael, keep theſe things for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of his people; and prepare them for his ſervice in this world, and for the eternal enjoyment of him in the world to come.

SERMON

SERMON XIV.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH AND SANCTUARY.

LEVITICUS XIX. 30.

YE SHALL KEEP MY SABBATHS, AND REVERENCE MY SANCTUARY: I AM THE LORD.

THAT the duties of the Lord's-day are various, and that ſolemn preparation for fitly performing them is neceſſary, cannot be denied. —But, alas! what is more neglected, even among profeſſing Chriſtians, than this preparation? Perhaps, ſome little of it may be made for the partaking of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper; though, even in that matter, there is too much reaſon to fear that it proceeds more from a kind of ſuperſtition, than from a holy affection and love for the Ordinance itſelf: But, as to the Sabbath, in general, there is very rarely any thing to ſeparate between the worldly buſineſs of the week, and its ſacred ſolemnities, except a *little ſleep*; and that commonly leſs than

than at other times; which is occaſioned by men's overburdening the Saturday night, with ſo many temporal concerns, that there is not time ſufficient to ſatisfy the body, with that neceſſary indulgence, without encroaching on the morning of the Lord's-day. In conſequence of this, many perſons cannot think of forcing themſelves out of bed, in proper time for performing either the duties of private or family devotion: nor even to attend the publick worſhip of the Sanctuary, until often the half and principal part of the ſervice is over.——How widely different the practice of ſuch, from that of the ancient Jews! So zealous and ſtrict were they in their preparation for the Sabbath, and ſo earneſt were they to be in readineſs to begin it preciſely at the appointed hour, that if the ſervants of the family were behind in their neceſſary domeſtick work, the maſter of the houſe, though a nobleman of the firſt rank, would not refuſe, or think it below him, to aſſiſt in the meaneſt offices.*—Shall not that people, though faulty in many things, ſtand up in judgment againſt this generation, and condemn it in this eſſential particular?

It is the duty of every Chriſtian to ſanctify himſelf for keeping holy the Sabbath, and for

* Buxtorf.

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joining in the ſacred ſervices of that day. Much depends on the frame of ſpirit with which we uſher in the Sabbath, and on the temper of mind in which we go through it. The bleſſed Jeſus, for our ſakes "ſanctified himſelf;" that is, ſeparated himſelf wholly for the work of a Redeemer: and ſhall not we ſanctify ourſelves for his ſake? And by labouring to be holy, even as he is holy, manifeſt our belief in him? "Holineſs becometh the houſe of the Lord for ever:" But when we repair thither with an unſanctified heart, and an unſuitable frame of ſpirit, we profane the Sabbath, and diſhonour the ſanctuary.

But, that we may have no pretence for our ignorance of the *Duties* of the Lord's-day, and no excuſe for our omiſſion, or careleſs performance of them, I ſhall now proceed, as propoſed, in the THIRD place,

III. To point out ſome of the *Duties* incumbent on us to obſerve on the Lord's-day.

There are *two* principal ways by which the Sabbath is to be ſanctified.—*Firſt*, By a ceſſation from labour; or, by a holy reſting all that day from ſuch worldly employments and recreations, as are lawful on other days.—And, *Secondly*, By

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ſpending it in the publick and private exerciſes of God's worſhip and ſervice.

1ſt. The Sabbath is to be ſanctified by ceaſing from all unneceſſary work, and manual labour, which on other days may be lawfully executed.—In this men may doubtleſs go into extremes; ſome paying too little attention thereto, as the Jews did before the captivity; and ſome carrying it too far, even to ſuperſtition, as the ſame people did after the captivity, for which they are cenſured by our Lord himſelf.*—But into this laſt mentioned error we of theſe times, and in this country, are in no danger of falling. Quite the reverſe!—A ſuperſtitious obſervance of the Lord's-day is not the prevailing vice of the age in which we live.—A contempt of ordinances, an averſion to things ſacred, riot and diſſipation, but too generally mark the characters of moſt people around us. It is therefore not to be wondered at, that the Sabbath is ſo commonly diſregarded, and ſo openly profaned.

Nor is the command, in our Text, reſtricted to a man's own perſon. It reaches to all who are under his power and management.——If a Parent, he is bound to ſee that his children are trained up in the knowledge and practice of this duty: that they be early taught to conſider

* Matt. xii.

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the Sabbath-day as holy; to abſtain thereon from their childiſh amuſements; and to reverence God's Sanctuary.—If a Maſter, he muſt take care that his ſervants reſt on this day; that no occaſion of unneceſſary work be given them; and that they attend on the publick worſhip of God; he being, in ſome meaſure, accountable for the conduct of his domeſticks.—In ſhort, every action, not abſolutely neceſſary, even the ſpeaking our own words, and thinking our own thoughts, with every thing that doth not contribute to the ſanctifying of the Sabbath, are expreſsly prohibited.—But to be ſomewhat more particular, we may obſerve,

That all works, which tend to our temporal profit and emolument, are forbid on the Lord's-day: ſuch as our profeſſions and callings, by which we ſupport ourſelves and families, and which may lawfully be followed on other days. —This is called *Our own work*, for the doing of which God has allowed ſix days in the week: during which time every induſtrious maſter, ſervant and labourer, may provide ſufficient proviſion for their ſuſtenance through the Sabbath; by the hallowing of which they may expect a bleſſing upon the labours of the week.—Again,

All ſecular works which are not abſolutely neceſſary to the ſafety, the life and preſervation

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of man and beaſt, are likewiſe prohibited on the Sabbath-day: ſuch are carrying of burdens, plowing, ſowing, reaping or gathering in, grinding of corn, fiſhing, hunting, and all other things of a ſimilar nature, unleſs ſome extraordinary diſpenſation of Providence requires them.

In like manner, the making of bargains, marketing, buying and ſelling of any thing, unleſs in caſes of preſſing neceſſity, are breaches of this commandment. They are inconſiſtent with the duties of the day, and conſequently diſturb, or hinder the devotions in which we ought to be engaged. It is impoſſible to ſerve both God and Mammon, to be ſpiritually minded, and carnally employed at one and the ſame time.—And it is a diſgrace to our magiſtrates, and thoſe in power, that ſuch open, ſuch barefaced violations of the Lord's-day, in theſe matters, are ſo frequently and ſo publickly permitted amongſt us, in open defiance of all laws both human and divine.

But if carrying on traffick or merchandize is ſo ſinful on the Lord's-day, how much more criminal are playing and gambling, vain ſports and ſinful paſtimes? And yet how ſhamefully do theſe practices prevail!—Surely nothing can be more inconſiſtent with praying and praiſing God,

God, with reading and converſing together on ſpiritual things. By ſuch conduct the minds of men are filled with gaiety and pleaſure, which render them incapable of ſerious reflection; and take their thoughts entirely off from God, from Religion, and the things of another life. This ſinful diſſipation gives the Devil every advantage over the ſinner, every opportunity, that the enemy of ſouls could wiſh, for ſtealing the good ſeed, the Word of God, out of his heart, if any of it there remains, and making it of none effect.—And if pleaſures and recreations, which may be deemed lawful on other days, are criminal on the Lord's-day, what muſt lewdneſs and intemperance, drinking and carouſing be, but a double breach, and a moſt horrible violation of God's law? This is doing our own pleaſure with a witneſs!—Would to Heaven that men did but ſeriouſly reflect; "that they underſtood this, that they would conſider their latter end!"

In fine, every thing that accords not with the holy reſt of the Sabbath is declared unlawful.—Thus, entering upon journeys on that day, however common, is an irreligious practice; far more ſo is that diſſolute cuſtom of riding on jaunts of pleaſure. So likewiſe is all unneceſſary walking and gadding abroad in companies, about the

the ſtreets, in gardens, or in the fields; ſince by ſo doing, to ſay the beſt of it, much uſeleſs and ſinful converſation muſt paſs, much precious time muſt be waſted, and many of the duties of the day, both of a publick and private nature, muſt be neglected.

Nor can I here omit taking notice of that prevailing, that idle, and ſinful cuſtom of making ordinary and civil viſits on the Lord's-day. —No doubt, it is natural for us to wiſh to ſee our friends, and to enjoy their company and converſation. It is alſo true that many are ſo confined, by buſineſs, through the week, that little time is left them for this ſocial intercourſe; and you might perhaps think it hard if you could not ſet apart the *Sunday*, or at leaſt a part of it, for this purpoſe.—But let me ſeriouſly aſk you this queſtion, Can you never find an hour in the ſix days, when buſineſs is over, which you may lawfully employ in this manner? Or, is there never what we call a *Holiday*, in which we may make merry with our friends? One would imagine that we might find opportunities enow, without robbing God of his right.—Believe it, my friends, that all the time allotted us, on earth, is no more than ſufficient for the great work of the ſoul's ſalvation; and we have very little need

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to loſe it, or ſquander it away, on things which, inſtead of profiting us, will greatly contribute to our loſs and final ruin.

Although theſe, and all other things inconſiſtent with ſanctifying the Sabbath, are forbidden by the Laws of God, we aſſert not, That all actions whatever are condemned.—From other parts of Scripture, from the practice of Chriſt and his Apoſtles, we learn that many things are lawful for us to perform on the Sabbath-day. As, for example, all the duties of *Religion*, ſuch as preaching, reading and hearing the word, and waiting on ſacred Ordinances: So likewiſe are thoſe things which are neceſſary helps for rightly performing theſe duties.—— Again,

All works of *mercy* are allowed to be done on the Sabbath-day:—ſuch as giving to the poor, and ſending of our plenty to thoſe who are in want. We are alſo to viſit the ſick, comfort the afflicted, inſtruct the ignorant, and adminiſter godly edification to all who are within our reach, or under our care. We are even commanded "to do well on the Sabbath-day," and to uſe every mean in our power to ſave our own life, and the life of others.

And as works of *mercy* may be performed without a breach of this holy day, ſo likewiſe

may works of *neceſſity*. Such are the preparing and uſing proper victuals, for the nouriſhing of our bodies;—the feeding and watering of our cattle; and the pulling them out of ditches, if perchance they ſhould fall into them.——For though a man might provide victuals which need no dreſſing, yea, might live on little, or nothing, for one day; and though beaſts might want food and water for twenty-four hours, without ſuffering much inconveniency; yet it has pleaſed our indulgent Creator not to ſtraiten us in theſe matters, leſt the Sabbath ſhould become a weariſomeneſs and a burthen to us, in place of a joy and a delight. "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;"* therefore God hath appointed it rather for a day of refreſhing than of afflicting his ſoul. And, as no particular rules can anſwer for all men, much is left to Chriſtian prudence and diſcretion; but ſo as not to exceed the bounds of that liberty wherewith it has pleaſed God to indulge his creatures.

But, perhaps, you may allege, That, if all theſe things, before mentioned, are prohibited on the Lord's-day, you would be at a loſs how to ſpend your time; and that day would lie heavy on your hand. This, with many, is cer-

* Mark ii. 27.

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tainly the caſe. But ſure I am, That no ſincere Chriſtian will be at any difficulty to find enough of ſuitable employment for the whole day.—— And, as the ſame duties generally return with the day, it may not be improper briefly to lay before you ſuch of them as ought particularly to occupy your time and attention.

Having, on the preceding night, called yourſelves to an account, relating to the tranſactions of the week then ending; and by ſolemn prayer committed ſoul and body to the keeping of your kind Creator, and fallen aſleep, as in his arms; ſo ſoon as you awake, and your eyes behold the light, ſet about your ſpiritual work. After earneſt endeavours to baniſh all carnal and worldly thoughts from your mind, begin with meditating on God, whoſe day you are about to ſanctify.——Think on his glory, his majeſty and power; on his grace and kindneſs towards you, in ſetting this day apart for ſuch pleaſant and beneficial exerciſes.—Meditate on the joys of Heaven, where you hope to ſpend a Sabbath of everlaſting reſt and endleſs felicity.—Above all, contemplate, with grateful hearts, the ineffable love of your gracious Redeemer, who, with his own blood, ranſomed you from the ſlavery of ſin and Satan; who delivered you from death; and drew you from the dark dungeon of deſpair.

Forget not that it was on the morning of this ſweet and bleſſed day that the Lord of Life aroſe from the dead, broke the bands of the grim tyrant, burſt aſunder the bars of the grave, and finiſhed the great work of our redemption.—Your hearts being thus impreſſed with a deep ſenſe of God's greatneſs and goodneſs, of Chriſt's inexpreſſible love and mercy to ſinners, and, at the ſame time, with a conſciouſneſs of your own weakneſs, guilt and miſery, you will, moſt likely, continue in that frame of ſpirit which is requiſite for properly diſcharging the duties of this ſacred day.

Having thus begun the Sabbath with divine meditation, you ſhould next addreſs the Throne of Grace by humble ſupplication and ſecret prayer.—In this duty you ought to take up more time, and converſe more at large with God, than on common and ordinary days. And there ſhould alſo be particular petitions, relating to the day: ſuch as, That the Lord would prepare your heart, "according to the purification of the ſanctuary;" that he would ſtrengthen, and come forth with his miniſtring ſervants; and direct them to ſomething ſuitable to your ſtate and condition; that the Word preached may profit, and tend to your ſpiritual nouriſhment and growth in grace.

Private

Private devotion being finiſhed, it is then the duty of ſuch as are heads of families, to call their children and ſervants together; that every particular member may join in preſenting their prayers and praiſes at the footſtool of the Divine Majeſty. For, in like manner, as the ſacrifices under the Law were doubled on the Sabbath, ſo now, under the Goſpel, private, family, and publick worſhip ought to be repeated, and extended to a greater length than on the other days of the week.—And it is the ſpecial duty of Parents, and Maſters of families, to take care that none of their domeſticks be unneceſſarily detained from joining in family worſhip, or kept away from the ſervice of God in his Sanctuary.

Here I cannot omit taking notice of the great neglect of this duty among Chriſtian families.—It may well give us cauſe of ſorrow and regret, to conſider how little attention is generally paid to it; and where in any meaſure it is countenanced, how careleſsly is it performed!—Is it not ſtrange and unaccountable that men, who in many moral and ſocial duties are ſtrict and conſcientious, have yet no conſcience, in performing the duties they owe to their Creator? Is it poſſible that men are aſhamed of Religion, and that they fear to ſuffer the impious ridicule of the profane, who may be ſo deſtitute of

Grace as to upbraid them with want of taſte and politeneſs, for having a profeſſion of Religion in their houſes, and for being ſo mean and vulgar as to bend their knee to God in company with their ſervants and domeſticks?—Miſtaken notions of true honour and taſte! What more honourable than to have acceſs to the King of kings at all times?—And what more becoming and delightful than to make our joint prayers and praiſes aſcend to the Throne of the Divine Majeſty! Is the caſe with any of you, my brethren, ſuch as I have now mentioned? And does the dread of being counted ſingular, keep you from any of theſe Chriſtian exerciſes?—If ſo, let me tell you, that your Religion is ſcarcely worth the keeping. For, if it is ſuch as you can be laughed out of, and which dares not ſhow itſelf, you may as well, nay, I had almoſt ſaid, you had better have none at all. If we are aſhamed of Chriſt and his "word before a wicked and adulterous generation," he hath aſſured us, That he alſo "will be aſhamed of us before his Father and the holy Angels."—But to return—

The duties of the Lord's-day morning being thus performed, yourſelves refreſhed with proper food, and decently apparelled, ſet out for the houſe of God, there to join in the worſhip-

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ping Aſſemblies of his people; and in ſuch good time as neither to diſcompoſe yourſelves, nor the audience, by intruding on them when divine ſervice is begun.—It is really ſhameful, to ſay no worſe of it, to ſee people coming into Church, when perhaps half, or more of the worſhip is finiſhed. Surely ſuch perſons cannot come with real deſires after God, and with the moſt upright intentions. Have ſuch no requeſts to make—no ſins to beg pardon for, nor any thanks to return to the Moſt High for mercies received, that they chooſe not to be preſent when prayer and praiſe are preſented to him?—Would to God that ſuch people would more ſeriouſly conſider the great importance of Religion, and the things that concern their true happineſs and everlaſting peace!

Being come into the Aſſembly of the Saints, have a ſtrict watch over yourſelves.—Beware, leſt vain and worldly thoughts enter into your mind. Watch over your eyes, leſt carnal looks ſteal your affections from God and his worſhip. Guard againſt the temptations of Satan and your own corrupt hearts, leſt they ſhould put you out of that ſpiritual frame which is ſo neceſſary for the true worſhippers of God and the Lamb. Hear the Word preached with faith, love and attention; and, being ſuitably affected there-

with, reſolve, through Grace, to put it in practice: for they only are bleſſed who hear the word of God and do it.

Upon returning home, go to your cloſet, and thank God for the ſpiritual food with which he has been pleaſed to feed you; and beg of him to ſeal, on your heart, the inſtruction received.—Think of the benefit you may have got, and wherein you may have failed, and come ſhort in duty.—For the one, return praiſe to Heaven; and for the other, implore pardoning mercy, through Jeſus Chriſt, the High-prieſt of our profeſſion, who feels for our weakneſſes and infirmities.—Search the Scriptures with candour, care and attention, in order to be ſatisfied that the things which you heard ſpoken from the pulpit were the truths of God, and ſuch as might miniſter edification to his people.

Having thus employed ſome time in ſecret, call together your family, and examine them on what they have heard; and from one and another of them, you may find, when all is put together, no ſmall part of the Sermon, which, through the bleſſing of God, may be of great uſe in your future conduct.—Thus, by ſinging praiſe to God, reading of the Scriptures, prayer, and religious converſation, end the Sabbath as you began it: Then may you expect the divine favour,

favour, and a bleſſing upon all your honeſt labours through the week: Then may you be aſſured of the Almighty's preſence, to conduct you ſafely through life, and finally to bring you to his kingdom and glory.

Much more might be ſaid on this important ſubject; but even from what has now been ſpoken, it is clear and evident, That the *ſanctifying* of the *Sabbath* is one of the principal duties which God hath commanded; for the pious obſervance of which he has, as already obſerved, promiſed the moſt ineſtimable bleſſings; and for the profane neglect of which he hath denounced the moſt dreadful curſes.—But, without further enlarging, we ſhall haſten to conclude our ſubject with ſome IMPROVEMENT on what has been ſaid.

If we were to judge by the conduct of men in general, and even of ſome who make a profeſſion of Religion;—if we were to form an opinion from what we may ſee every Lord's-day, in the life and converſation of many thouſands of perſons in and about this great Metropolis, we ſhould certainly be led to think, that there was no ſuch precept in all the Scriptures as that in our Text; nor any thing like the *fourth* commandment in the Decalogue.—Behold how this ſacred day is loſt in ſloth, or ſpent

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in profanity!—Sleeping, dreſſing, viſiting, gadding abroad, in even worſe than idle companies, drinking and debauching, take up that precious time which ought to be employed in the ſervice of God, and in preparing for an eternal world. And whilſt houſes of publick entertainment, thoſe temples of the Devil, are crowded, the houſe of the Lord is deſerted, and the Ordinances of Religion neglected, or deſpiſed!—And as to keeping up the worſhip of the great Creator in his family, where is the man that dares to be ſo unfaſhionable?—Not but that there are ſome, who are not aſhamed of ſuch religious exerciſe; but ah! how few in compariſon!—If this is a true picture of the times, no wonder if truth is departed from the earth, and equity from among men; that for all theſe things the hand of the Lord is ſtretched out againſt us; that the land mourn, and we walk in the midſt of troubles.

Believe it, my friends, That the profaning of the Sabbath is one of the greateſt crimes which can be committed againſt the firſt table of the law; and it is often followed with ſignal judgments, even in this world.—This many of you have probably obſerved: And I am verily perſuaded, That you ſcarce ever knew of a malefactor's being brought to the gibbet, if he had any

any ſenſe of his guilt, or awakenings of conſcience in his ſoul, who did not acknowledge that neglect of God's worſhip, and profanation of the Lord's-day, had been the chief cauſes of his ruin, and of leading him to the commiſſion of thoſe ſins which brought him to an utimely end. As a proof of this, let the advice and confeſſion of one criminal at the place of execution ſuffice.

"Shun," ſaid he, "the ways of ſin, for there is no pleaſure in them; I ſpeak from fatal experience; and you may be aſſured that a man in my ſituation has no motive to deceive. Therefore acquaint yourſelves with God and be at peace.—Make the Sabbath-day a day of holineſs unto the Lord, and then it will become to you a bleſſing. I know that the fear of God is, in this world, regarded as the effect of a cowardly and ſuperſtitious ſpirit: but when the awful moment of death approaches; when, like me, you ſtand on the brink of eternity, then you will find that a daring temper will deſert you, and fears and terrors will ſucceed.—Take warning then before it be too late."*—"Frequenting publick-houſes on the Sabbath-day has been been my ruin," exclaimed a fellow-ſufferer.—Of that piercing anguiſh which the reflection on

* One Crew, executed at Glouceſter in 1786.

miſpent

miſpent Sabbaths has occaſioned, I, myſelf, have been a witneſs.

Had God never expreſsly commanded us to *reverence his Sanctuary*, yet ſound *reaſon* would have taught us the propriety of this duty. Neglecting to attend upon God, in the worſhipping Aſſemblies of his people, is not only an improper behaviour in us, and a ſhameful diſreſpect to our neighbours, but likewiſe a heinous affront to the Almighty, who is thereby openly diſhonoured, publickly diſavowed, and his holy Religion prejudiced in its power, its credit and reputation.—Were there ſtated times, by law appointed, for every man perſonally to attend his Prince, and to acknowledge him publickly, by doing him homage and fealty, would not all loyal ſubjects look upon thoſe who abſented themſelves, without neceſſity, as guilty of diſhonouring their rightful Sovereign; at leaſt of having little regard for him, or his laws?—In like manner, we diſhonour God, when we refuſe, or neglect to attend him in the courts of his houſe, at the times which he has appointed for his publick worſhip and ſervice. By ſo doing, we manifeſt a diſreſpect for the Almighty, and put an open ſlight upon his Religion; as if it were a thing of no conſequence, nor utility. In effect, we, like thoſe ſpoken of in Job, "ſay unto

unto God, Depart from us, for we deſire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him? And what profit ſhall we have, if we pray unto him?"*—By this unbecoming conduct we not only hurt ourſelves, but, by our pernicious example, we lead others to the ſame ſinful courſes, and harden them in their impiety.—God demands this publick attendance on him, as his due; and has, by one of his great heralds, thus publickly proclaimed, "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and ſtrength: Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: worſhip the Lord in the beauty of holineſs."† —This He requires; and, if we refuſe to obey, may we not expect to meet with his juſt and merited reſentment? If we are careleſs about ſerving God, is it not reaſonable to think, that he will be unmindful of bleſſing us? And, if we are ſo backward to own and glorify him, can we expect that he will be forward to own and honour us? No; He hath ſolemnly declared, that "whoſoever ſhall deny him before men, ſhall be denied by him before his Father which is in heaven."‡

It is a great truth, my brethren, and you will find it ſo at laſt, That the oftener you put this

* Chap. xxi. 14, 15. † Pſal. xxix. 1, 2. ‡ Matt. x. 33.

duty

duty in practice, ſo much the better will it be for you; and the more it will be for your real intereſt. We are every moment receiving favours from Heaven; and, in gratitude, we are bound to acknowledge them. We are conſtantly offending; and ought, as often, to confeſs our ſins, and ſue for mercy. To neglect this, is baſely to betray our moſt important concerns, and wilfully to ſacrifice our own happineſs.

Beſides, devotion is that celeſtial fire which enlightens our minds with ſpiritual knowledge, and kindles in our hearts the warmth of holy deſires. And if this is long diſcontinued, a night of darkneſs will ſoon overſpread our minds, and a deadening coldneſs ſeize upon our affections. —Prayer is the beſt food for our ſouls: if we long abſtain from it, they will pine away and ſtarve: and our piety, if any remains, will be feeble and languid.—Faith, hope, love, holy joy, with all the divine graces, are drawn out, expreſſed, and exerciſed in this duty: and if it is not regularly performed, we ſhall fail in other duties; and be in danger of loſing our beſt graces. If we ſeldom wait upon God, we ſhall know little of him; and ſoon become indifferent about remembering him. We ſhall become inſenſible of his love, and regardleſs of his favour. A coldneſs, an averſion, and at laſt, an antipathy

to

to him, will by degrees creep upon us: And, by keeping away from his company and preſence, we ſhall, moſt likely, contract friendſhip and familiarity with his enemies.—When this comes to be the caſe, how awful the conſequences!

It is really alarming to ſee how much the end and deſign of this holy day is perverted, both in town and country.—It is indeed kept by many as a *holiday*, in their ſenſe of the word: but ſhame on ſuch a keeping!—Was it for theſe ends that God ſanctified it, and commanded us to keep it ſacred, namely, That we might therein do our own ſinful work, or worldly buſineſs, follow our own licentious pleaſures, and ſpend it in diſſipation, riot and debauchery?—That, inſtead of waiting upon God in his Sanctuary, and faithfully diſcharging their religious duties, men ſhould leave their homes, roam about the country, and idly ſpend the money with which they ought to pay their juſt debts, or ſupport their families through the week: And not only ſo, but frequently run themſelves into ſnares and temptations, into trouble and diſtreſs, both of body and mind, which they would never have known, never experienced, had they, by keeping the Sabbath and reverencing the Sanctuary, followed God in the ways of his commandments.

Theſe,

Theſe, my brethren, are ſerious matters, and moſt intereſting truths, whether you believe them or not. You may now treat them with indifference, and perhaps with ſcorn and contempt. But be aſſured, That there is a day haſtening on, when you ſhall be convinced of their great importance, and made to own it, with ſhame and confuſion of face, before God, Angels, and Men, if you continue to make light of thoſe things, and perſiſt in the neglect of thoſe duties which the ſupreme JEHOVAH has ſo poſitively enjoined.

May the Spirit of Wiſdom and Revelation make us know our duty; and give us ſtrength to perform it, to the glory of God, to the honour of Religion, and the eternal happineſs of our immortal ſouls, for Chriſt's ſake. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XV.

A SERIOUS AND INTERESTING INQUIRY.

GENESIS xlvii. 8.

HOW OLD ART THOU?

THIS, as you may learn from the context, was a queſtion put to a venerable Patriarch by an Egyptian king. Jacob, after having experienced many viciſſitudes in life, was carried, in his old age, from the land of Canaan, the place of his nativity, and the promiſed poſſeſſion of his poſterity, into the land of Egypt. Joſeph, his ſon, whom his envious brethren had ſold for a ſlave, was, by the providence of God, advanced, from the dungeon, next to the throne, and made Ruler over all the country.—During the ſeven years of famine, with which Egypt, and the adjacent kingdoms, were then viſited, he ſends for his father and friends, that he might nouriſh and keep them alive whilſt the ſcarcity continued.

Upon the Patriarch's arrival, Joſeph introduces him to Pharaoh. The Egyptian Monarch was, no doubt, taken with the venerable appearance of Iſrael, who was now in an advanced age: and who, having been a man of labour and ſorrow, through the greateſt part of his life, muſt have carried ſtrong marks of his longevity. Beſides, the inhabitants of Egypt being, in general, ſhorter lived than thoſe of Canaan, the age of Jacob might be rather wonderful to Pharaoh and his court. However that may have been, the king, moved by a curioſity natural to us all, puts the queſtion, "How old art thou?" to which he receives the following anſwer; "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."*—And, with the Patriarch, ſo may many, or moſt, of us ſay, "Few and evil have the days of the years of *our* life been."—His had been few when compared with eternity, or the life to come; few in the ſight of God, with whom "one day is as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day." They were few in compariſon to the age of the antediluvian Patriarchs;

* Verſe 9.

or

or even to that of Terrah, the father of Abraham, who lived two hundred and five years; they were fewer than thoſe of Abraham, who lived an hundred, threeſcore and fifteen; and ſhort of thoſe of his father Iſaac, who arrived at an hundred and fourſcore years.—*Evil* they had particularly been.—To ſave his life he had been compelled to leave his father's houſe, to fly from the face of his angry brother, and to ſojourn in a ſtrange land.—There he ſerved ſeven long years for a wife; and, at the expiration thereof, had another given him in her ſtead. Yea, after twenty years ſervitude to his father-in-law, he was under the painful neceſſity of ſtealing away from him.—His own family alſo gave him inexpreſſible grief. His daughter was raviſhed: his ſons vexed his ſpirit with their cruelty: and,—what crowned all his ſorrows, his beloved ſon was taken from him, and believed to be for ever loſt.—Simeon had been left a captive in Egypt; and Benjamin, the ſon of his old age, muſt likewiſe be torn from his embraces. All theſe things he ſeverely felt to be againſt him.*—They were apparently ſo: but, through the providence of God, many of his troubles were bleſſings in diſguiſe, and finally contributed to increaſe his happineſs.

* Gen. xlii. 36.

The words of my Text I beg leave to propoſe to each of you, my dear auditors; not for the ſake of an idle curioſity, but for your inſtruction and advantage. They contain a queſtion which we ſhould frequently put to ourſelves, and alſo ſeriouſly conſider. It is proper at all times, and upon every occaſion: but more eſpecially when the revolution of the ſeaſons, the beginning of months and years particularly remind us that time is on the wing, and the day of our departure haſtening on apace.*

In further diſcourſing on this paſſage of Sacred Writ, I mean only—To make a few ſerious reflections on the *ſhortneſs* and *uncertainty* of "the days of the years of our life" on earth:—And then apply them more particularly, by way of *addreſs*, to the different claſſes of my hearers.

And may the God of all fleſh, in whoſe hands our life is, "ſo teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wiſdom:" and ſo help us to ſpend the precious moments we now enjoy, that, before we cloſe our eyes in death, our calling and election may be made ſure. Amen.

I. I am to make a few ſerious Reflections on the *ſhortneſs* and *uncertainty* of the time of our ſojourning upon earth.

* Preached on the firſt Sabbath of the year.

That

That "the days of the years of our life are *few* and *evil*," is a truth which moſt men will acknowledge; and to which the experience of every day bears teſtimony. Certain it is that here we have no continuing city, no permanent abode. We are all travellers through this world to another: and the ſooner we get to the end of our journey, and are put in poſſeſſion of that better country where we wiſh to arrive, ſo much the greater will be our happineſs. Man cannot, nay would not, live here for ever.—— The firſt ſtep he makes in life is alſo the firſt towards the grave. He no ſooner opens his eyes upon the light, than the ſentence of death is pronounced againſt him; and he ſeems only to live in order to die.

True, our Creator, when he formed our clay, breathed into it a ſpark of divine life, which no length of time could weaken or extinguiſh. Sin alone could quench this celeſtial ſpark: and ſo it has done.—Adam our father ſinned; and no ſooner became a ſinner than he became mortal. By his ſin death entered into the world; and ſo has paſſed upon all his poſterity. From our birth we carry in our boſoms the ſeeds of diſeaſe and death, which daily grow up and gather ſtrength. We ſeem to have ſucked a ſlow poiſon in the bowels of our mothers, and to

have brought it into the world with us. It cauſes us to pine and languiſh, for a certain ſeaſon; ſome longer, and ſome ſhorter; but always works our diſſolution. Every paſſing moment takes off a portion of our time, and brings us nearer "to the houſe appointed for all living." That ſpiritual fire which animates, does at the ſame time conſume: and our whole life is nothing but a long, a lingering diſtemper.

We muſt indeed allow that this latent poiſon does not operate alike on all, and that the meaſure of our days are unequal.—Some we behold going down to the grave, like a ſhock of corn fully ripe; whoſe ſilvered hairs indicate old age. Full of years, and ſurrounded with a numerous offspring, they die in peace and ſleep with their fathers.—Others ſtop ſhort in the middle of their courſe: like good Hezekiah, they ſee the gates of the tomb opened for them; and in vain ſearch for the reſidue of their years.*—Others juſt come into the world, and make their appearance on the ſtage of time; they continue through the morning of life, and then, as if already tired of mortality, lay down the body, and diſappear.—They fall like the flower of the field, which flouriſhes at morn, and at even is dried up and withereth away.

* Iſa. xxxviii. 10.

But,

But, as the *ſhortneſs* of life ought to raiſe in our ſouls the moſt ſerious reflections, ſo its great *uncertainty* ſhould mightily alarm us. The fatal moment appointed for each of us remains a ſecret, written in the book of God's eternal decrees, which none but the Lamb has a right to open. We believe that the call for us to depart hence will be given, but whether in the morning, in the noon, or evening of life, we know not. We live altogether uncertain as to the number of our days.—And what is wonderful ſtrange, that very *uncertainty* which ought to ſtir us up to diligence and watchfulneſs, ſo that in the laſt hour we may not be taken unawares, rather lulls our vigilance aſleep!—We will not think of death, becauſe we are ignorant of the time when it will come!—Surely nothing can be more fooliſh and abſurd than this. I appeal to yourſelves.—Is an evil which may befal you every day, every hour, and even every moment, leſs to be dreaded than that which threatens you at the end of a determinate number of years? Becauſe the danger is immediate, and always preſent, are care and attention leſs neceſſary? In what elſe, than in the buſineſs of your ſouls ſalvation, would uncertainty be allowed to produce ſloth and ſecurity?—Does the conduct of that ſervant, mentioned in the Goſpel, who, becauſe

he was uncertain as to the time of his lord's coming, began to uſe his goods as if he had never been to account for his management, ſeem prudent?—If it does not, why will you imitate it? Does not our bleſſed Maſter mention this in order to excite us to conſtant watchfulneſs?—And what has Religion more powerful to rouſe us to vigilance, than the uncertainty of a dying hour? If, when we came into the world, we had carried on our foreheads the determinate number of our years, and the fatal day on which they ſhould end, that fixed and inevitable hour, however diſtant, would often come into our minds, and greatly diſturb our tranquillity. That image, almoſt ever preſent, would, in ſpite of our boldeſt efforts, render all our pleaſures inſipid, our friends and fortune indifferent, and all the world, with life itſelf, a wearineſs and a burthen.—This awful period, ever in our view, would repreſs our paſſions, extinguiſh our animoſities, diſarm our vengeance, calm the boiſterous ragings of the fleſh, and mingle itſelf in all our projects. Thus knowing our appointed end, and the fixed number of our days, our whole work would be to prepare for that alarming hour that ſhall finiſh our earthly exiſtence.

But ſhall death ſeen at a diſtance, and at a ſet time, alarm our fears, withdraw our affections from

from the world and ourſelves, and bring us back to God?—And ſhall that ſame death, when uncertain, though it may ſeize us every day, yea, every moment, make no impreſſion on us?—Shall that death which may arreſt us in the twinkling of an eye, and which is perhaps at the very door, ready to precipitate us into the world of ſpirits, give us no diſquiet?—Yea, ſhall we not only remain careleſs and indifferent about it; but be cloſely attached to our criminal paſſions, be fond of the world, its pleaſures, its riches, and its vanities?—Becauſe we are uncertain whether or not this day will be our laſt, ſhould we live as if our years were everlaſting?

We, who are now aſſembled in this place to worſhip the Lord God of our Fathers, are but a few of the many millions of people upon the face of earth; nevertheleſs, it is highly probable, nay, almoſt certain, that we ſhall never all meet again to celebrate the praiſes of the High and Holy One of Iſrael, on the firſt Sabbath of another year.—Before another revolution of the ſeaſons, ſome of us may have bid adieu to this world, and all its enjoyments.—Ere that time, our pulſe may have forgot to beat: "the ſilver cord may be looſed, or the golden bowel broken, or the pitcher broken at the fountain, and the wheel

wheel at the ciſtern; the duſt ſhall have returned to the earth, as it was; and the ſpirit unto God who gave it."—Before the expiration of the year, which is now begun, our day may be cloſed, and our ſun ſet in endleſs night: Our bodies, conſigned to their laſt and dark abode, may ſleep amidſt the clods of the vallies; and we ourſelves be as if we had never been.—This will moſt probably be the caſe with ſome who now hear me, without emotion or concern, as if they were nowiſe intereſted. Every one puts it from himſelf, and is unwilling to think the caſe his own. Could I now view the book of God's decrees, and particularly point out the firſt victims to the king of Terrors, how ſoon would the colour of your countenance be changed!—and what a damp would ſuch a diſcovery throw on your ſpirits!—Yet, whether you will hear, or whether you will forbear, the inevitable hour awaits us all. And, although we know not whether it is fixed in this, in the following, or in ſome more remote year, it will arrive: after which there is no delaying. When the ſummons of death is put into our hands, we muſt obey. We muſt leave our clay-built tenement, and appear before the tribunal of our Judge; there to receive a ſentence of approbation, or condemnation, which ſhall fix our ſtate,

and

and conſign us over to everlaſting joy, or endleſs ſorrow.—Happy, thrice happy they, who, when the call is given, are found prepared!—To them death, come when he will, ſhall be no alarming meſſenger! "Therefore, my beloved brethren, watch ye, ſtand faſt in the faith, quit you like men, be ſtrong."—"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning: and ye yourſelves like unto men that wait for their lord."

Having thus made a few reflections on the *ſhortneſs* and *uncertainty* of the "days of the years of our life" on earth, I ſhall, as propoſed in the *next* place,

II. Apply them more particularly, by way of *addreſs*, to the different claſſes of my Auditors. And,

1ſt. To you, *my young friends*, let me put the queſtion, ſeparately, "How old art thou?"—Few, you may reply, have been the number of our years. We are but juſt entered into the theatre of the world, and only begin to act the firſt part in life's various ſcenes.—Well; But what do you know of God and Religion? Do you underſtand the end for which he created you; and, according to the abilities poſſeſſed at your tender age, have you endeavoured to anſwer

ſwer that end?—Have you been informed of the great worth and value of your ſouls; that they are of a ſpiritual and exalted nature, not ſubject to decay or diſſolution; that they die not with your bodies, but are immortal and eternal in their exiſtence?—Are you not alſo perſuaded that this life is but the beginning of life; and that, according to the good, or evil you now do, you ſhall be rewarded, or puniſhed, through eternity?—I hope that you know all this, and whatever elſe can be expected from your youthful years. If ſo, happy are you in having religious parents, and faithful inſtructors; who have made it their care to inſtil into your minds the principles of piety and religion. This is the kindeſt and beſt thing they could have done for you; and it is the ſureſt ſign of their real love and regard.—Believe it, my yet inexperienced auditors, that the ſeeds of virtue early ſown, while the heart is free from bad impreſſions, will take the deepeſt root; and, if not neglected, will produce the largeſt quantity of the beſt and the faireſt fruit.—Now is the proper time to acquire virtuous habits, and to lay in a ſtock of uſeful knowledge, which will render your life happy, and your death comfortable.—If it ſhall pleaſe God to ſpare you to arrive at man's eſtate, you, and not only you, but ſociety in general, will

will feel the benefit that ariſes from a religious education.

Or, if it ſhould ſeem good in the eyes of your heavenly Father to call you hence in an early period of life, and to remove you from this troubleſome world, before you experience its pains and diſappointments, the greater will be your gain.—Though young, you may die.—Nay, the tendereſt flower is the eaſieſt cruſhed under foot.—Death does not reſpect years!—He takes the young, as well as the old!—No doubt but that you have obſerved ſome of your own age, and of the number of your acquaintances, called out of this world into another.—When you paſs through the church-yards, you will ſee graves of your length, and ſculls of your ſize: and who can tell but that you, like them, may be early called on to increaſe the number of the dead?—Nor would this be to your loſs, if you are found among the children of God, and the lambs of Chriſt's flock. While, therefore, you are ſpared in the land of the living, be mindful that you muſt die. O remember your Creator and Redeemer in the days of youth. The great God, who made you, claims your obedience to his commandments: and Jeſus Chriſt, who died to ſave you from the devil, ſin, death and hell, deſires you to ſeek after him,

him, that he may at laſt bring you to heaven and eternal glory. Be aſſured, my young friends, that thoſe who ſeek God early ſhall moſt certainly find him. Nothing is more pleaſing in the eyes of the Lord than to ſee children walking his ways: nor is there ſweeter muſick in his ears than their prayers and praiſes. Attend to the great encouragement which your Redeemer himſelf gives you; "Suffer," ſays he, "little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of ſuch is the kingdom of God."* And if you thus live mindful of your Creator, obedient to your parents, and others who have the charge over you, and do to all men as you would that they ſhould do unto you, then you will live beloved of God, and of all good men: and whether death ſhall come in the morning, in the mid-day, or evening of life, it will prove to your unſpeakable advantage.

2dly. Next to my young auditors, permit me to addreſs a few words to *you* who are now *in the bloom and vigour of youth*; whoſe mountain ſeems to ſtand ſtrong; and who are probably flattering yourſelves with many happy years to come.—Do you ever ſeriouſly reflect on what part of your life is paſt? And, with a deſign to take off your thoughts from the vanities of this

* Luke xviii. 16.

world,

world, and to turn them upon yourſelves, do you ever thus inquire, "How old *am I?*"—Too ſeldom, I fear, with that deſign.

Conſider, my youthful friends, That you are now arrived at a period of life, when the powers of both body and mind are approaching to their meridian, or full ſtrength.—You have already ſeen many revolutions of the ſeaſons; and it may reaſonably be expected that you have done ſomething for the honour of God, and for the good of mankind.——Conſider what it is.——Alas! If I may judge of you, by myſelf, I may anſwer for us both, and ſay, Little, or nothing! —Nothing that deſerves to be accounted of.

You are now in the moſt dangerous ſeaſon of life. Filled with thoughts of the world, and of ſenſual gratifications; other things, of greater importance, ſeldom attract your attention. This is the time of all others, the moſt to be dreaded; and, conſequently, you ought to be the moſt on your guard.—This I may aſſert from my own experience; and, therefore the more freely I can ſpeak to others.—Do you not acknowledge that the love of the world, and the love of the creature, have often withdrawn your heart from the love of God and divine things? —Have not youthful pleaſures, "the luſt of the fleſh, the luſt of the eyes, and the pride of life,"

life," captivated the affections of your ſouls, and made you forgetful of the "one thing needful," even your eternal ſalvation?—Would to God you could anſwer me in the negative!

But, perhaps, you may be ready to think, if not openly to ſay, Why ſuch haſte with theſe ſerious reflections?—reflections which would damp our ſpirits, render all our pleaſures inſipid, and throw a gloom of melancholy over the brighteſt ſun-ſhine of life?—Youth is the ſeaſon made for joy; and why ſhould we let it paſs unoccupied?—We have ſcarce reached the meridian of life; and we ſhall have time enough to reflect on theſe ſerious matters in our riper years, and when old age diſqualifies us to reliſh and purſue our preſent enjoyments.

Are theſe your ſentiments?—Is this the language of your hearts?—Well; go on, and put them in practice. "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth; and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes:—But know thou, that for all theſe things God will bring thee into judgment."*—Unthinking man! Doeſt thou know that thou ſhalt ever arrive at old age? And art thou certain that this ſhall not be the laſt year of thy life? Nay, who

* Eccleſ. xi. 9.

can

can tell but that thy ſoul may this very night be required of thee; and that, before to-morrow's ſun gilds the tops of the mountains, thou mayeſt be ſtretched out a breathleſs corpſe; and all thy hopes, all thy glory, with thyſelf, laid low in the duſt? The well-built frame, the ſtrong ſinewy limbs, and the broad ſhoulders, will nothing avail in the conflict with the griſley monarch! Nor will riches, wit, or beauty, have any power to deliver from his awful ſtroke!

On what then do you build your hopes, that you live in ſuch an unaccountable forgetfulneſs of your latter end? Is it on *youth*, which ſeems to promiſe you many happy days to come?—Alas! how many have we ſeen carried to their long home, with their breaſts full of milk, and their bones moiſtened with marrow? How often have we beheld the ſtout, the active and the vigorous, whom neither the dangers of the deep, the horrors of war, nor the moſt painful toils, could hurt or diſmay, cut off in the midſt of his days; and, by ſome ſudden ſtroke, conſigned to darkneſs and inactivity, within the walls of the narrow houſe?—Where are now many of the cheerful companions of your ſocial hours?——Shut up in the ſilent chambers of corruption, with them mirth has ceaſed, and the ſound of

the viol is heard no more.—In youth would you confide? Ah! this is the unhappy time when licentious morals, lawleſs pleaſures, reſtleſs ambition, outrageous paſſions, table exceſs, and follies of every kind predominate:—And this is the ſeaſon in which many of Adam's unthinking ſons finiſh their courſe. Abſalom might have grown old in peace, had he been a dutiful ſon, and free from ambition:—Shechem, had he not loved Dinah:—Jonathan, if glory had not dug him a grave on the mountains of Gilboah:—and Macedon's king might have lived to enjoy his conqueſts, had he not been voluptuous.—Verily, my friends, there is no truſting to this reſource. Youth is the ſeaſon which has often filled the palace, and the cottage, with ſorrow and ſadneſs!

On what then do you rely? On a ſtrong and healthy conſtitution? Ah! truſt not to that which, at beſt, is but a broken reed; a ſpark, extinguiſhable by the ſmalleſt breath. A fit of common ſickneſs is ſufficient to pull down the moſt healthful and robuſt body; and to make it, in a few days, a weak, a helpleſs and pitiable object. Truſt not then to youth, to health or ſtrength; nor let the proſpect of the continuance of theſe cauſe you to forget your immortal concerns. Believe me, when I tell you, That the

days

days of youth are the beſt for working out the the great work of your ſalvation.—The infirmities of old age ill ſuit with ſuch a taſk.—Vicious habits, once deeply rooted, can hardly be eradicated. A decayed and tottering frame, or a bed of ſickneſs, will have enough to do in ſupporting the animal ſpirits, and enduring the ſharp pangs of diſſolving nature; and, therefore, is the moſt improper that can be imagined, for beginning a work of ſuch magnitude, and of ſuch importance.

Seize then the happy moments, now given you, to make your peace with God, to ſecure an intereſt in the Redeemer's purchaſe, and to make your calling and election ſure. Waſte not the days of youth and health in ſloth and indolence; or in doing that which will not profit in the latter end.—Do not imagine, that, after you have ſpent the prime and vigour of life in the ſervice of the devil, God will then be content with a few feeble prayers, and ſome faint wiſhes to ſerve him, when you can no longer ſerve your former maſters: or that he will then beſtow upon you the gift of heaven and eternal happineſs, which you ſo long ſlighted and deſpiſed.—Up therefore, my friends, up and be doing whatſoever your hand findeth to do.—Give not ſleep to your eyes, nor ſlumber to your

eye-lids, till you have ſecured an habitation in thoſe bliſsful manſions, where gray hairs and death ſhall never invade the bloom of immortal youth.—When this done, the approach of your laſt enemy will neither alarm nor diſmay.

Laſtly. Permit me to conclude our preſent exerciſe with a few words to you my aged *Fathers* and *Mothers*:—Nor take it amiſs that one, ſhort of your years and experience, pretends to give advice.—Youth may learn from the folly, as well as from the wiſdom, of old age. And, if your paſt years have been ſpent in the ſervice of God, and in preparing for eternity, you need not to be aſhamed when I put the queſtion to each of you, "How old art thou?"—If they have been thus employed, then it muſt give you comfort to think that they are drawing near to an end; and that, with them, all your cares and troubles will ſoon terminate.—But if they have not, then it is now high time for you to ſet about ſeeking after God, if haply you may yet find him. While there is life, there is hope: and while the day of grace continues, ſalvation may be obtained.

You are ſenſible, no doubt, that the greateſt part of your life is paſt; and that you muſt ſoon depart hence, to make room for the ſucceeding generation: yet, even the oldeſt of you, are ſtill willing

willing to think that you may live a few years longer.—This deluſion, for ſo it may be called, has, I greatly fear, deſtroyed many thouſands of precious ſouls. For, by building on this uncertainty, they have delayed to prepare for a dying hour, until death has ſeized them, unprepared and unawares.—Let the awful example of ſuch put you on your guard, and prevent your falling into the ſame error. You ſtill enjoy life and the day of grace. Your kind and compaſſionate Saviour, who hath no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, ſtill holdeth out the golden ſceptre of ſalvation, and invites you to come unto him. Reject not the gracious offer; for long you may not have it. To day hearken to his voice; and harden not your hearts, leſt he caſt you off for ever. By a ſincere repentance, and on the wings of faith and love, fly to Chriſt, the only place of ſafety for penitent ſinners; where the devouring ſtorms of divine vengeance ſhall not overtake you.

But, ſuppoſing that there were no puniſhment hereafter for thoſe that die in their iniquity, you ought to conſider what a ſhocking and deſpicable thing it is to ſee an old withered ſinner going on in the paths of vice, attempting to reiterate his youthful follies; and, even contrary to nature, tranſgreſſing the laws of his God.—

On the contrary, how beautiful and becoming it is to ſee old age adorned with piety; and the crown of gray hairs proving a crown of glory! With what holy joy does the ſoul, ripe for heaven, receive the ſummons by which he is called from the ſtage of duty, to the laſting enjoyment of the reward of his labours! Having ſome foretaſte of the pleaſures which await the ranſomed of the Lord in the celeſtial Canaan, the aged ſaint longs to lay down his hoary head in peace, to put off the body, that the ſpirit may repoſe in the boſom of his Father and his God. How pleaſant, how comely is old age, when adorned with piety!—How tranquil the evening of life to the righteous!—How ſoft his ſlumbers; and how joyful his awakening.

Perhaps the beginning of his life was full of troubles, and his condition far from being deſirable. Like the ſun that riſes in a miſt, and travels in his courſe, through the greater part of the day, hid in ſable clouds, but ſets in a clear and ſerene ſky, thereby foretelling his bright riſing again; ſo many a Chriſtian begins his courſe in a miſt, travels along, under clouds and darkneſs, winds and rains, till he gets near to the end of his journey; when the light breaks forth upon him, gladdens his heart, revives his ſpirits, and encourages him in his heavenly way; And the

nearer

nearer he approaches to the verge of an eternal world, like a beautifully ſetting ſun, he ſhines brighter in all the graces of the ſpirit; giving a ſure and certain evidence of his riſing again in ſuperior glory and unfading effulgence.—Zion's travellers may, for a long time, find the way thitherward narrow, rugged and thorny: But the agreeable ſmoothneſs in the latter part, and the delightful proſpect at the end, will make ample compenſation for all.—The Chriſtian may live in a ſtorm, but he dies in a calm.——Like aged Simeon, he departs in peace, having ſeen ſeen the ſalvation of his God; and enters into the poſſeſſion of eternal reſt.

Many of you, my worthy friends, have, through the goodneſs of God, lived a greater number of years than the bulk of mankind generally do. But after them all, I doubt not your readineſs to pronounce, from trial and exrience, all things below the ſun, "Vanity and vexation of ſpirit."——Ah, how ſhort is that which muſt end!—Do but look back, and conſider your former years. Where are they? What reality do they leave in your memories? No more than a dream of the night!—You recollect that you have lived; and that is all that remains of them. The whole ſpace from the day of your birth, to this day, is like a road

you ſcarcely remember to have travelled over: And were your years now coeval with the world itſelf, all that are paſt would appear neither long nor ſubſtantial. You would conſider all the ages that are paſt as ſo many fleeting moments, —all the people who have appeared and diſappeared on the ſtage of the world,—all the revolutions of empires and kingdoms,—with all the great events which embelliſh hiſtory, as the different ſcenes of a play, which you have ſeen exhibited in a few hours!—And, if it ſhould pleaſe God to add a few more years to your life, do you imagine that the time to come will prove more permanent than that which is paſt?—Believe it not.—Years appear long, when at a diſtance, but when arrived, they eſcape, they vaniſh, as in an inſtant!—Age ſucceeds age.——The figure of the world paſſeth continually.—All things change:—all things wax old:—all things vaniſh away.—God alone remains the ſame, yeſterday, to-day, and for ever; without variableneſs or ſhadow of turning.

Conſider, my aged Fathers and Mothers, that whilſt the young *may* live, you *muſt* die.—Already you feel nature decay, and the earthly tabernacle verging towards its original ſtate. The dim eye, the weak hand, the toothleſs jaw, the feeble

feeble knees and tottering pillars, all indicate the approaching ruin of the building!

Well, ſince it muſt be ſo, ſince your mortal frame muſt be diſſolved, have you been ſo diligent as to get a manſion above the ſky, prepared for your ſoul when ejected from her cottage of clay?—If this is the caſe, the courſe of your life cannot be too rapid: moments of ſin, and months of woe, cannot fly too faſt!—But if your ſoul, when about to be diſlodged from her earthly houſe, hath not an habitation in the heavens prepared for her reception, how diſmal the parting!—and what a complicated ſcene of horror and miſery muſt await the ejected ſpirit!

Remember, my friends, that the ſoul's ſalvation is a matter of eternal importance; therefore, think in time, and uſe every mean to accompliſh it.—Though ſhort and uncertain the time of our ſojourning in this world, great things depend on the good or bad uſe we make of it:—Yea, our everlaſting ſtate ſhall be fixed accordingly.—God has been graciouſly pleaſed to add another year to your life; perhaps it is the laſt. However that may be, I would have you to look upon it as ſuch. Uſe it diligently for the beſt of purpoſes; namely, in making preparation for the life to come.—Having once obtained a true and ſaving faith in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, go on during

during the remainder of your time, in the lively exercise of that faith; and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance:" so that when your mortal shall put on immortality, death may be swallowed up in victory.

May the Almighty cause his Holy Spirit to descend upon this assembly. May he water your souls with the dew from on high.—May he make this year a year of love and happiness to us all; and a blessed preparation for eternity: so that "whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live or die, we *may* be the Lord's." Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XVI.

CHRISTIANS ARE NOT TO DESPISE, NOR FAINT UNDER GOD's CHASTISEMENTS.

HEBREWS xii. 5.

MY SON, DESPISE NOT THOU THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN THOU ART REBUKED OF HIM.

"MAN that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble." Affliction, at one time or another, is the lot of every man that cometh into the world. If at preſent we are exempted from it, we neither may nor can expect that we ſhall always be ſo. What is our neighbours caſe to-day may be ours to-morrow. We have no ſecurity for ourſelves more than they, and therefore ſhould look for it in our turn. It is the fruit of our firſt Parents' unhappy fall, and hath deſcended from them, as an entail, to all their poſterity. No age nor nation was ever known which hath not felt its iron hand; and few, or none, of our mortal race, were ever poſſeſſed of ſo much apathy as to

to be altogether inſenſible of its weight. But before the light of divine revelation, men being ignorant of its Author, its nature, and likewiſe of the end and deſign for which it was ſent, and the proper uſe they were to make of it, ran from one extreme into another, from a ſtupid inſenſibility into a hopeleſs deſpair, under the oppreſſive weight of which they have at laſt utterly ſuccumbed.

Herein is manifeſted the great difference there is between the Chriſtian religion and every other, and how ſuperlatively excellent it is in compariſon. This alone can bear up a man under the preſſure of affliction; this can give him ſtrength when ſtruggling hard with adverſity; and this only can make the rugged paths of life ſmooth and eaſy. By the ſpirit of God we are made to underſtand That "affliction cometh not forth of the duſt, neither doth trouble ſpring out of the ground*: Nor is it the random ſtroke of blind chance or capricious fortune; but the will of that omnipotent JEHOVAH who at firſt commanded all things into exiſtence, and who, by his wiſdom, regulates them according to his pleaſure. Nor is God poſſeſſed of infinite power only, but alſo of unbounded mercy and love, and will not chaſtiſe without

* Job v. 6.

a cauſe.

a cauſe. It is his love for us that makes him correct us. Being alſo omniſcient, he knows when it is neceſſary for our welfare; and will, when he ſends it, give ſtrength and patience to bear it. To the man who hath not learned the real utility of affliction it may ſeem a heavy curſe: but when it hath accompliſhed in him the ſalutary end for which it was ſent, then he is convinced that it is an ineſtimable bleſſing. Affliction is ſent by God to rouſe men from their ſloth and carnal ſecurity; to check their career in a courſe of iniquity, by making them reflect on their ſinful ways, and return to God by a ſpeedy and ſincere repentance: And leſt we ſhould be too much caſt down under the hand of God, he hath promiſed that his grace ſhall be ſufficient for us, and his ſtrength made perfect in our weakneſs.* Beſides, as the very thought of his chaſtiſements is apt to make us ſhrink back, and count them too weighty for human nature to ſuſtain, he hath ſet before us examples of the moſt worthy and heroic men in all ages, who, through affliction, attained to perfection, and by much tribulation, entered into the kingdom of heaven. In fine, affliction is the nobleſt field for the trial and exerciſe of every chriſtian grace: And there the ſaints of

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

God,

God, in all their conflicts, have gained the palm of immortal honour.

The time would fail, were I able to ſhow, the ſcope here given for the glorious diſplay of theſe noble virtues, Faith, Love, Patience, Hope, Meekneſs, and Charity.—All I ſhall therefore attempt is,—FIRST, To explain the words or our Text.—SECONDLY, To ſhow that there is no real cauſe why the children of God, and the faithful followers of Chriſt Jeſus, ſhould faint under the chaſtiſements of their heavenly Father, and the rebukes of their compaſſionate Lord.—And, THIRDLY, Give ſome ſhort and uſeful Advices to perſons under affliction.

And may he who is the Hope of Iſrael, the Refuge of the oppreſſed, and the Relief of the afflicted, accompany with his effectual bleſſing our feeble efforts to infuſe the balm of comfort and conſolation into the grieved in heart, the wounded in ſpirit, the mourning and drooping ſoul, that is groaning under the chaſtiſements of his heavenly Father, and ready to faint under the rebukes of his God.

I. I ſhall endeavour to explain and illuſtrate the words of our Text,—which evidently contain two *Cautions*, or *Exhortations*, of a very different

different nature. The *firſt* is, to beware of *deſpiſing*, or making light, of the chaſtiſements of the Lord; and the *ſecond* is, to guard us againſt too much *dejection*, or *fainting*, under his rebukes. "My ſon, deſpiſe not thou the chaſtening of the Lord;" that is, my ſon in the faith, my child whom I have begot in the Lord, and whom I love as the ſon of mine own bowels, it is to you, and you only, I now addreſs myſelf; therefore, hear my words, and let my counſel ſink deep into your heart; deſpiſe not, contemn not, nor ſet at nought, by your obſtinacy and perverſeneſs, the chaſtening and afflicting hand of your God.

What we are to underſtand by "deſpiſing the chaſtening of the Lord," I ſhall endeavour to illuſtrate by a familiar example.—A father hath a ſon obſtinate, diſobedient, addicted to vice, and hurried on to folly by his violent paſſions.—All this the tender-hearted parent ſees with unwilling eyes, and is, to his grief of heart, too well convinced of its truth. Earneſtly does he wiſh it were otherwiſe: and therefore, in order to reclaim his untoward child, and prevent, if poſſible, his utter ruin, he firſt admoniſhes, and ſets before him a portrait of vice in its native deformities; withal repreſenting to him the fatal and unavoidable conſequences that muſt enſue,

enſue, if he does not ſpeedily turn from his evil ways.—All this the fooliſh ſon heareth, as though he heard not; nor will he attend to the inſtructions of his father.—The unhappy parent, ſeeing that his reproofs are hated and his counſels deſpiſed, armeth his hand with the rod, and correcteth his ſon. But, alas! all is in vain. Fooliſhneſs is ſo bound up in his heart, that the rod of correction cannot drive it out. The rebellious child grows callous and inſenſible to puniſhment; and the grieved father is at laſt forced to give him up to himſelf; and, with much reluctance, leaves him to be carried away by his folly, which at length lands him in irretrievable perdition.

Thus dealeth our heavenly Father with the ſons of perverſeneſs. He gives them his word to direct, and his precepts to guide them; he iſſues out his threatenings to deter them from the paths of folly; he purſues them with his love, and kindly invites them to return unto him from whom they have revolted. He not only proclaims a free pardon for paſt offences, but gives them the moſt ſure and ample promiſes of everlaſting felicity, upon their returning to their duty. All this the hardened ſinner diſregards, and, like the deaf adder, ſhuts his ears to every call and invitation; till at length God,

God, juſtly incenſed, lifts up the rod of his juſtice, and chaſtiſeth the obſtinate offender. This meets with no better ſucceſs. His heart is hard as the nether milſtone, and paſt all feeling; upon which the Almighty "gives him over to a reprobate mind," ſaying, as he did of old concerning Ephraim, He "is joined to idols: let him alone."* Thus, after "being often reproved, he hardeneth his neck, and ſhall ſuddenly be deſtroyed, and that without remedy."†

There is likewiſe another way by which men may be ſaid to deſpiſe the chaſtening of the Lord; that is, by attributing to *chance* and *ſecond cauſes* the operations of the Almighty, and the events which he cauſes to take place, for accompliſhing his good and wiſe purpoſes.—This is a very common ſin, and heinous in its nature; a ſin which nothing but wilful blindneſs, and unbelief of the ſacred Oracles can produce: for no man who acknowledges the divine attributes, eſpecially thoſe of *omnipotence* and *omniſcience*, can be ſo weak and fooliſh, as to aſcribe the works of God to fortuitous cauſes. Certain it is that every man, if he ſeriouſly reflects, will diſcern the hand of the Lord in whatever befalls him.—Let us beware of this great tranſgreſſion; and reſt aſſured, that if "even the very hairs of

* Hoſea. iv. 17. † Prov. xxix. 1.

our head are all numbered, and a ſparrow cannot fall on the ground without our heavenly Father,"* ſo none of the ills of life can aſſail us without his knowledge and permiſſion.

This, I hope, will ſerve to explain what is meant by "deſpiſing the chaſtening of the Lord," and deter us from falling into ſo grievous a tranſgreſſion.

But as we are not to *deſpiſe*, or make light, of the chaſtiſements of the Lord, ſo neither are we to *faint*, or *ſuccumb*, under his rebukes.—What we are to underſtand by the caution, "Nor faint when thou art rebuked of him," I ſhall likewiſe endeavour to illuſtrate by another eaſy example.

A man hearing that a fortune is left him in a diſtant country and that it behoves him to go thither to claim it, is ſo animated with the hope ſet before him, that, notwithſtanding his being aſſured that the road is bad, and the journey long and tedious, he prepares to enter on his way with courage and alacrity. Being ſtrong in body, and cheerful in mind, every nerve braced, and the whole frame exhilarated by an ample flow of animal ſpirits, he ſets out; and, leaving his former reſidence, directs his ſteps towards the wiſhed for land. At firſt he finds things go

* Mat. x. 29, 30.

on

on tolerably eaſy; and even better than expectation. Difficulties, however, increaſe.—The road becomes more deep and dangerous.—Croſſes and troubles ſurround him. All theſe he braves with fortitude and reſolution; and long purſues his way without wearying or fainting. But after much vain hope, and the proſpect of attaining his end growing ſmaller and ſmaller, the day darkening, and the ſky louring, an impending deluge threatening, and deſire itſelf failing, he begins to get fatigued; his ſpirits flatten, and his ſtrength decays; his joints weaken, and his ſinews relax; ſupported only by ſome glimmerings of hope he ſlowly "plods his weary way." But ſtorms and tempeſts ariſing, and the clouds returning after the rain, hope itſelf, the laſt ſupport of the wretched, vaniſheth; and the diſconſolate traveller ſinks down in deſpair.

Thus, the diſciple of Jeſus being aſſured that there is a moſt valuable treaſure laid up for him in the country of Immanuel, whither his divine Maſter is gone to prepare for him an incorruptible inheritance, he longs to poſſeſs it. This poſſeſſion is enſured to him upon his having travelled through the wilderneſs of this world, and been faithful unto death.—And, leſt he ſhould be offended when he meets with harſher treatment than he might have expected in the way to ſo

fair a country, he is previouſly told that the path which leads to the celeſtial manſions is rough and narrow; that there are many difficulties and hardſhips which he may expect to meet with; that there are many enemies, ſecret and profeſſed, eagerly ſeeking after his ruin; who will endeavour to rob him of all his virtues, to impede his journey, and avail themſelves of every mean, which open violence, or ſecret guile, can uſe, to work his deſtruction; and "that through much tribulation he muſt enter into the kingdom of God."*—All this he believes; but, convinced of the ſuperior worth of the promiſed poſſeſſion, he is willing to ſubmit to all theſe conditions, however hard; and judges it imprudent to forego a prize of ineſtimable value, becauſe there are difficulties in obtaining it.

Thus prepared, and, as he thinks, fortified againſt all events, he turns his face towards the New Jeruſalem, and with joy enters on his way. He, even with pleaſure, encounters every trial, and ſmiles in the face of danger itſelf.—Temptations of the devil he reſiſts.—To be entangled with the pleaſures, or diſturbed with the frowns of the world, he diſdains.—The fleſh, with its corrupt luſts and affections, he mortifies; and for a long while nobly preſſes forward. But the

* Acts xiv. 22.

winds

winds of adverſity blowing higher and higher, and the thick clouds of affliction burſting over his head, he begins to be diſmayed; and one calamity preſſing on the back of another, bears him down, and makes him walk on with a ſlow pace and a heavy heart.—Being ſtill at a diſtance from the object of his wiſhes, and no preſent proſpect of reaching the deſired abode, his faith begins to ſtagger; and the enemy, taking the advantage, fills his ſoul with deſponding thoughts, and endeavours to perſuade him that God hath forſaken him, and now taketh vengeance on him becauſe of his iniquities. Thus, his virtues, which once ſhone ſo bright, are darkened: his fortitude is turned into weakneſs: fear and terror overwhelm him: exhauſted and faint he ſits down, ready to deſpair.

This ſin of *fainting* under God's rebukes, though perhaps not equal in guilt to that of *deſpiſing* his chaſtenings, is, nevertheleſs, the moſt common error of the two; and for that reaſon principally to be guarded againſt:—I ſhall therefore proceed, as propoſed in the SECOND place,

II. To ſhow that there is no real cauſe why the children of God, and the faithful followers of Chriſt Jeſus, ſhould *faint under the rebukes*

and chaſtiſements of their heavenly Father :—— And for theſe following reaſons,

1ſt. Becauſe " the chaſtening of the Lord," is a mark of his fatherly *Love* and *Affection*.— " For," as the Apoſtle aſſerts in the verſes following our Text, " whom the Lord loveth he chaſteneth, and ſcourgeth every ſon whom he receiveth. If ye endure chaſtening, God dealeth with you as with ſons: for what ſon is he whom the father chaſteneth not?"—God's corrections are tokens of his love, and the means which he often uſes for bringing ſons and daughters unto glory. " You only," ſaith JEHOVAH, ſpeaking of his own inheritance, " have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will puniſh you for you iniquities."*—Would we reckon it any proof of a parent's love to his child if when he ſees him commit a fault worthy of ſtripes, he lets him go unpuniſhed?—Should we not rather think that his father hated him, and had left him to himſelf, not caring whether he did ſtand or fall? And have not we much more reaſon to look upon it as an unerring mark of our heavenly Father's love, that he doth not withold proper nurture from his children, nor ſuffer them to go on in a courſe of ſinful proſperity?—Beſides,

* Amos iii. 2.

" If

"If ye be without chaſtiſement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye baſtards and not ſons."* —Might we not juſtly reckon him a fooliſh ſon, who would declare himſelf willing to give up the title and inheritance of his father, and be deemed a baſtard, in order to avoid coming under the kind, though correcting, hand of his parent?—And what wiſer is the man who would diſpenſe with this mark of God's favour, to get rid of ſome troubleſome chaſtiſements?—Such perſons do not conſider that an uninterrupted courſe of proſperity in ſin, is one of the moſt deſperate conditions a man can fall into; and is ſo far from being a bleſſing, that it is, in truth, a heavy judgment.—Proſperity is not the field where virtue flouriſhes:—The ſoil is too rich: a luxuriancy of baleful weeds chokes the tender plants, and renders them unfruitful. "When Jeſhurun waxed fat he kicked."† When Iſrael was "fed to the full they then committed adultery, and aſſembled themſelves by troops in the harlot's houſes."‡—Adam's fall was in paradiſe. —Noah's abundance proved a ſnare and a temptation unto him.—Sodom was a nurſery of filthineſs and beſtiality whilſt pride, fulneſs of bread, and abundance of idleneſs were in her.—David, in time of peace and eaſe, became a

* Ver. 8. † Deut. xxxii. 15. ‡ Jer. v. 7.

 tranſgreſſor;

tranſgreſſor; and Solomon, in the midſt of his ſplendour and opulence, apoſtatized from his God.

Such has been the opinion of ſome of the wiſeſt men, concerning an uninterrupted courſe of proſperity, that they have even ſhunned the company, and broke off all connexion with thoſe who enjoyed it. It is reported of St. Ambroſe, that being upon a journey, and coming to an inn, he heard the landlord boaſt, That through his whole life he had never known what it was to be under trouble and affliction: upon which that father would not ſo much as lodge for a night in his houſe; but foretold a ſudden deſtruction to him and his, which ſoon after came to paſs.

That the Heathens themſelves entertained the ſame ſentiments, reſpecting a long ſeries of proſperity and its baleful conſequences, is evident from the famous ſtory of Polycrates, a prince of Samos, who died about 522 years before the Chriſtian era.—This prince was ſo ſingularly ſucceſsful in every undertaking, that he had ſcarcely a wiſh ungratified. Every year of his reign, every enterprize, however hazardous, had been marked with ſucceſs. His ſubjects, whom he had reduced to obedience, were faithful and loyal: They accounted themſelves happy,

not

only on account of his victories, but even of his pompous manner of life, and of the magnificent palaces he reared at their expence. So many marks of grandeur attached them to their Sovereign, and made them forget the crimes of which he had been guilty, during his uſurpation of the Government.—Polycrates himſelf, fluſhed with proſperity, no longer remembered the ſage counſels of Amaſis, king of Egypt, with whom, by the ties of hoſpitality, he was formerly united.—"Your uninterrupted courſe of proſperity," ſays the king to Polycrates, by a letter, "alarms and terrifies me; for the Deity never allows a mortal to enjoy unalterable felicity. Endeavour to procure for yourſelf vexation and croſſes, in oppoſition to the uniform and obſtinate deciſions of fortune in your favour."

Polycrates was alarmed by theſe reflections, and reſolved to ſecure his proſperity by a ſacrifice which would give him extreme uneaſineſs. He had an emerald of great value, mounted in gold, on which Theodorus, the moſt famous artiſt then in the world, had engraved a lyre of exquiſite beauty; a work ſo much the more valuable, as the art of engraving upon precious ſtones was then in its infancy among the Greeks. This emerald he always wore upon his finger.

One

One day he embarked on board a galley, which was rowed to a great diſtance from the ſhore, and there threw his favourite ring into the ſea. But his grief, on this account, was only of ſhort duration: for in a few days afterwards, one of his officers found the emerald in a fiſh he had caught, and brought it unto him.—Polycrates inſtantly informed Amaſis of this; and the king, from that moment, broke off all further communication with him.

The fears of Amaſis were at laſt realized.—While Polycrates meditated the conqueſt of Ionia, a ſatrap of the king of Perſia enticed him to make a viſit, when, after having put him to death by the moſt excruciating and horrible torments, he ordered his body to be fixed to a croſs raiſed upon mount Mycale, which is oppoſite to Samos, his native country and kingdom.*

True it is, my brethren, that forgetfulneſs of God, proud looks, high thoughts, ſelf-importance, and vanities of every ſort, are the uſual concomitants of proſperity; and theſe, too, too often, rob men of religion, piety, and every virtue; whereas the rude blaſts of adverſity would have kept them humble, and in a proper diſpoſition.—Thus, the children of God, inſtead of repining, or ſinking under the preſſure of afflic-

* Voyage du jeune Anacharſis en Grece. Tome vi. p. 302—3.

tion,

tion, ought to thank their heavenly Father for it; and eſteem it one of the moſt precious bleſſings which come from his bountiful hand; remembering that he hath ſaid, "As many as I love I rebuke and chaſten."*

2dly. Another reaſon, why the true Chriſtian ſhould not faint, when rebuked of his God, is,—Becauſe it is done for his *profit* and *advantage*.

"The Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."† He taketh no pleaſure in our miſery: Love reigns in all his diſpenſations towards us; and our *profit* is the ultimate end of them all. "Furthermore," ſaith the Apoſtle, "we have had fathers of our fleſh which corrected us; and we gave them reverence: ſhall we not much rather be in ſubjection unto the Father of ſpirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chaſtened us after their own pleaſure; but he for our profit."‡

The ways of God are frequently dark and obſcure; and we may not, for a long time, perceive the cauſe of our affliction. Men are often very negligent of their duty, and careleſs of ſearching into their own hearts; and, without perceiving it, they wander away from the paths of righteouſneſs, till the rod of affliction rouſes them from their inattention, and ſets their ſins before

* Rev. iii. 19. † Lam. iii. 33. ‡ Heb. xii. 9, 10.

them

them in legible characters. Then do they begin to bethink themſelves: then they ſet about ſearching their hearts, in order to find out the latent cauſe of all their ſorrow. And when that is diſcovered, they are ready to cry out, with the Pſalmiſt, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."* And why ſo good? Becauſe, "before I was afflicted I went aſtray: but," mark the happy change; "now have I kept thy word."†

Nothing is indeed more fit than ſanctified afflictions to call our ſins to remembrance, and ſet them home upon our conſciences.—Never do we find the ſons of Jacob ſo much as once thinking on the grievous ſin they had committed againſt God, in the matter of their brother Joſeph, until reduced to great ſtraits in Egypt. Then, but not till then, did they reflect upon it, and "ſaid one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we ſaw the anguiſh of his ſoul when he beſought us; and we would not hear: therefore is this diſtreſs come upon us."‡ Never till Manaſſeh was bound in fetters, and carried captive to Babylon, did he humble himſelf before the God of his fathers. In the time of proſperity, when all things run ſmoothly on, we are apt to promiſe ourſelves great things; and to buoy up our

* Pſal. cxix. 71. † Ver. 67. ‡ Gen. xlii. 21.

minds

minds with vain expectations. But, when the hand of God is lifted up, when he writes bitter things againſt us, then we begin to reflect on our grievous offences, and, by a timely repentance, are led to ſeek pardon and forgiveneſs of him from whom we have revolted.

God is alſo pleaſed to uſe afflictions as the means of reforming our lives and manners, and of bringing us home to himſelf.—Famine and want ſoon brought the prodigal ſon to a ſenſe of his duty, and a deſire of returning to his father's houſe."* Many diſeaſed perſons came to Chriſt, whilſt thoſe that were whole diſowned him.—When the ſtorms aroſe, when "the ſea wrought and was tempeſtuous, the mariners were afraid:" When the ſhip was every moment in danger of ſinking, or of being daſhed to pieces by the waves, and nothing but immediate death before their eyes, the rough and hardy ſailors were brought to their knees, and made to cry out, "We beſeech thee, O Lord, we beſeech thee let us not periſh."† Thus, when afflictions preſs hard upon men, they are wont to call upon God, to acknowledge his juſtice, confeſs his power, adore his majeſty, implore his mercy, and promiſe a more willing ſubjection and ſincere obedience to all his commandments.

* Luke xv. 14. † Jonah i. 14.

It

It is nowiſe uncommon for us to place our affections on trifles, whilſt we deſpiſe things of the greateſt value. So long as things go well with us in this world, we look no further. We hug ourſelves in the enjoyments of life, without ever thinking that we muſt leave them; or that there is a ſtate beyond death and the grave.—Time and its pleaſures ſo entirely poſſeſs our hearts, that we are ready to ſay, "This is my reſt, here will I ſtay, for I do like it."—Riches and honours, friends and renown, engroſs our whole attention; whilſt God, heaven and a future ſtate, are far from our thoughts.—Our heavenly Father, who is ever concerned for our welfare, obſerving our ſtrong attachments to the enſnaring pleaſures of the world, in order to leſſen their value in our eyes, to convince us of their vanity and inſufficiency to make us happy; and, conſequently, to wean our heart and affections from them, imbitters them unto us: And, in proportion, as our love to earth diminiſhes, our love to heaven will increaſe.—If we place our confidence in wealth, God will diſperſe it; that he may make us rich in faith and good works.—Are we inceſſantly purſuing after that empty ſhadow honour? God will bring us down; that we may become humble, lowly in ſpirit, and meet for inheriting the kingdom of heaven.

heaven.—Do our friends and relations engroſs that love, that affection and eſteem, which belong to God only? Theſe, though the greateſt of earthly bleſſings, will he remove and take from us; that he may poſſeſs our hearts without a rival; and make us court his favour alone, which will never fail nor change. Is it our ſole ambition to be famous and renowned among men? And is our reputation with the world dearer to us than our God? This will he alſo ſuffer to be blaſted; to the end that we may learn to ſeek the applauſe of our divine Maſter, and be ambitious only to be held in repute at the Court of Heaven.

3dly. Another reaſon why the children of God ſhould not faint under the rebukes of their heavenly Father is,—Becauſe, that when he lays his chaſtening rod upon them, he doth it for the *trial* and *exerciſe* of their *faith* and *patience*; and for making their *graces manifeſt to others.*

Adverſity is the true touchſtone of every Chriſtian, and the ſure teſt of his virtues. It takes off every maſk, and ſhows him in his genuine colours. The furnace of affliction refines the ſolid, and evaporates the unſubſtantial and only aſſumed virtues. It makes the man of God perfect through ſufferings; taking away his droſs, purging his tin, and cauſing him to

come

come forth as the moſt fine gold.—As the body languiſheth for want of exerciſe, and as the limbs, by diſuſe, forget to perform their office; ſo, a Chriſtian's graces languiſh and decay, when not employed: And if God did not uſe affliction as the means of reviving and ſtrengthening them, they would be in danger of being entirely loſt. As the moiſture of the air corrupts the baſer metals, and cauſeth them to ruſt; ſo, a long courſe of proſperity, the pleaſures and affluence of this world, are very apt to corrupt and intoxicate the minds of men; and make them forget both God and themſelves.—That he may prevent this, God, like a kind and conſiderate parent, puts them under the diſcipline of the rod: And this is ſo neceſſary a piece of education that we find few, or none, of thoſe ancient worthies, who have made the moſt illuſtrious figure in the annals of ſacred hiſtory, that have not been trained up in the ſchool of adverſity, and thereby reached the ſummit of glory and renown.—Was not Abraham proved to be the Father of the Faithful, and the Friend of God, when, at Heaven's command, he was ready to offer up his beloved ſon Iſaac in ſacrifice?—Was not Jacob bleſſed with the viſion of God, and comforted with the promiſe of Canaan's land to him and his ſeed for ever, when flying from

from the face of his angry brother?—Did not the dungeon prove the road to all Joſeph's future greatneſs? And were not the falſe and ill-grounded accuſations of his miſtreſs the means of raiſing him to the ſecond chariot of Egypt?—Moſes, when provoked in the wilderneſs, for the ſpace of forty years, by the ſins and rebellions of a diſobedient and gainſaying people, was proved to be the moſt meek and gentle of all men.—Job, who ſtands the firſt on record for his integrity, and who will be celebrated to the lateſt ages for his unparalleled patience and reſignation under affliction; even he, though atteſted by God himſelf to be the moſt juſt and upright man upon earth,* was not exempted from drinking deep in adverſity's bitter cup, yea, deeper than ever any other mere man did.——And was not David, the man according to God's own heart, hunted as a partridge upon the mountains, by Saul his inveterate enemy?—and forced to flee from his houſe and kingdom before the fury of his rebellious and unnatural ſon Abſalom?

In ſhort, it would be endleſs to enumerate the many inſtances that might be given, from the ſacred writings, of perſons, dear in God's ſight, who have nevertheleſs felt his ſevere, but

* Job i. 8.

fatherly, corrections: and after having bravely weathered out every ſtorm that aſſailed them on life's tempeſtuous ſea, have at laſt landed ſafely on Emmanuel's ſhore.—Theſe, let every child of God think on and imitate; then will he be fully convinced, that there is no real cauſe why he ſhould faint under the chaſtiſements of his heavenly Father, and the rebukes of his compaſſionate Lord.

Many other reaſons might be adduced, but as the time, at preſent, will not permit, and as ſome of them may naturally preſent themſelves in the following part of this Diſcourſe, I ſhall finiſh our preſent exerciſe with prayer to Almighty God, that he will accompany what has been already ſaid with the powerful and ſaving influence of his Holy Spirit; thereby cauſing us to find comfort and relief in all our ſtraits, and joy amidſt all our ſorrows.—May "the peace of God, which paſſeth all underſtanding, keep your hearts and minds through Chriſt Jeſus;—to whom be glory for ever and ever." Amen.

SERMON

SERMON XVII.

THE PROPER IMPROVEMENT OF AFFLICTIVE PROVIDENCES.

HEBREWS xii. 5.

MY SON, DESPISE NOT THOU THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN THOU ART REBUKED OF HIM.

HAVING, in the preceding Diſcourſe, attempted to explain and illuſtrate the meaning of theſe words, "My ſon, deſpiſe not thou the chaſtenings of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him;"—and likewiſe endeavoured to ſhow, That there is no real cauſe why the children of God, and the faithful followers of Chriſt, ſhould faint under the chaſtiſements of their heavenly Father, and the rebukes of their compaſſionate Lord;—I ſhall now proceed to the THIRD, the laſt, and, I perſuade myſelf, not the leaſt neceſſary part of our ſubject, namely,

III. To give ſome ſuitable, and, I truſt, uſeful *Advices* to ſuch as are under the chaſtening and correcting hand of their God.—And,

1ſt. Let me exhort you to uſe every poſſible mean to get juſt notions, worthy and becoming ſentiments of *Almighty God*, the omnipotent Creator, and ſupreme Governor of the World.

Conſider him as a BEING poſſeſſed of unbounded *Mercy*, as well as of ſtrict *Juſtice*; of infinite *Goodneſs*, as well as of incomprehenſible *Wiſdom* and *Power*; as One who hates nothing that he has made; and whoſe kindneſs to his children, in particular, is unlimited; having their good and happineſs in view, even in his ſevereſt chaſtiſements.—Be perſuaded that He, who meaſures out the degree and continuance of your afflictions, knoweth all things, paſt, preſent, and to come; and that they ſhall never exceed the bounds which his wiſdom and power have appointed.—He who ſays to the raging ſea, "Hitherto ſhalt thou come, but no further: and here ſhall thy proud waves be ſtayed;"* will alſo ſay to your diſtreſs, Hitherto mayeſt thou come; to this height thou mayeſt ariſe; but further thou ſhalt not proceed.—

* Job xxxviii. 2.

Look

Look upon God, who afflicts, not as an enemy, but as a father; who correcteth his children, not from choice, but from neceſſity.—Theſe conſiderations, with the aſſiſtance of reaſon and duty, which you muſt be careful to call in, will bring your mind into a proper temperature, and preſerve you from the violent out-breakings of immoderate anger, murmuring, ſorrow and fear, which are but too apt to ſally forth, at the firſt onſet of afflictions; and which often add greatly to the weight and continuance thereof, by throwing more grains of ſin into the ſcale of adverſity; thus making repentance more bitter and laſting, as the ſins to be repented of are augmented. Beſides, a ſoul, under ſuch perturbation and diſorder of mind, is very unfit to approach the divine Preſence, and beg of God the needful ſuccours, and the deſired relief.—Next,

2d. Make as ſpeedy and ſtrict an *inquiry* as poſſible into your preſent condition, and try to find out what are the cauſes, what the motives, of the Lord's thus dealing with you: and at the ſame time, conſider what improvement you ought to make of his diſpenſations.

"Let us ſearch and try our ways," is the voice of the rod. And, if we would profit by

the admonition, we muſt be careful to underſtand what theſe chaſtenings ſay; and what we are to do with them, and under them. We muſt likewiſe ſeriouſly conſider whence our afflictions come; that they are from *God*, who holds in his hands the reins of univerſal Government; from *our* God, who ſees our ſins and hates them; and who, whilſt he puniſhes them, pities and commiſerates his creatures.—This effect the three years of famine, which befel Iſrael, in the reign of David, had on this pious king. That national calamity made him inquire into the cauſe thereof; and having diſcovered it, he ſought for the means whereby he might appeaſe the divine wrath.*—And when the poſterity of Jacob, fell before the inhabitants of Ai, their defeat was the cauſe of a ſearch being made in Achan's tent.†

Indeed, the affliction itſelf very often points out to the conſcience what ſins have been committed, and are ſtill unrepented of; as there is frequently a great ſimilarity betwixt the crime and the puniſhment. Adonibezek's cruelty, and David's adultery, were manifeſt in their puniſhments, and ſoon brought their ſins to their remembrance. And, if you attentively conſider the nature of your afflictions, you will, in moſt

* 2 Sam. xxi. 1. † Joſ. vii. 10, &c.

caſes,

caſes, be at no great loſs to find out the reaſon why God contendeth with you.

Do you ſuffer in your wealth and outward eſtate? Are you fallen from affluence and grandeur, into poverty and contempt? Then conſider if you did not place your confidence in your wealth, and boaſt yourſelf in your riches: think if covetouſneſs, and worldly mindedneſs did not precede your fall.—Do you ſuffer in your good name and reputation? Has the tongue of malice, envy, and ſlander, wrongfully violated your character, and cauſeleſsly injured you in the good opinion of the world? This being the caſe, conſider if you have not carried yourſelf too haughtily reſpecting your reputation, and proudly ſet it up as your idol.—Have friends forſaken you in times of diſtreſs, when their advice and aſſiſtance were moſt neceſſary? Or, have your dear relatives, who were your greateſt earthly comforts, and the chief ſupports of your life, been raviſhed from you, by the cruel and unrelenting hand of death? Think ſeriouſly if they did not fill that place in your heart which God ſhould have occupied; and often engroſſed that love and affection which ſolely belonged to him.—Are you under bodily afflictions, ſuch as pain, ſickneſs, and waſting of the earthly tabernacle? Is there no ſoundneſs in your fleſh, nor hilarity

in your ſpirits? Conſider if your time and labour have not been employed to cheriſh and pamper the body, whilſt the ſoul, the more noble part, has been neglected and ſtarved.—If you find, upon inquiry, that this has really been the caſe, humbly acknowledge the juſtice of God in all your chaſtiſements; "hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." Repent of your ſins, and firmly reſolve, through divine grace, to forſake them: and, in God's good time, all ſhall again be well.

But if, upon ſearch, you find your conſcience clear, and void of offence, towards God, your brethren, and yourſelf, it is nevertheleſs your duty patiently to ſubmit to the hand of the Lord; believing that it is a diſpenſation ſent from him for your good, and which you ought carefully to improve for that end.

Or if, by this ſcrutiny, you find that your ſufferings are for righteouſneſs ſake, and the keeping of a good conſcience, then rejoice; for now they loſe the very nature of afflictions, and become an honour, a real bleſſing, and a filling up of your Saviour's ſufferings; who has declared thoſe bleſſed who are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake.*—But beware that in this your heart does not deceive you, and make you think

* Matt. v. 10.

that

that you ſuffer for the ſake of godlineſs, when it is for your own folly and perverſeneſs. We are wonderfully apt to be flattered, and to believe well of ourſelves: we are eaſily perſuaded to think that we endure perſecution for Chriſt and his Religion, when we are only bearing the effects of our own ſinful vanity and inconſiderate raſhneſs.

3d. Having found out the cauſe wherefore God contendeth with you, and why he "viſits your tranſgreſſion with the rod, and your iniquity with ſtripes," then endeavour to receive his viſitations with a *humble*, a meek and quiet ſpirit.

Did we but reflect on the number of our ſins, on the heinouſneſs of our offences, and on the demerit of our crimes, inſtead of riſing up to call the juſtice of God in queſtion, or of thinking that our puniſhment is greater than our iniquities have deſerved, we would lie low in the duſt; and, in the words of holy Job, thus expreſs ourſelves, "Surely it is meet to be ſaid unto God, I have borne chaſtiſement; I will not offend any more."*—Behold, I am vile; what ſhall I anſwer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I ſpoken; but I will not anſwer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no

* Chap. xxxiv. 31.

further."

further."*—And with David confeſs, "I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulneſs haſt afflicted me."†

Well does it become man, at all times, to be humble in the ſight of his Maker; but more eſpecially, when his hand ſeems to be lifted up againſt him, and his countenance to frown.—Well may ſinners, when they think on their own baſeneſs, and, at the ſame time, on the holineſs and purity of the Almighty, put their mouths in the duſt, and proſtrate themſelves before his footſtool. Well may creatures whoſe origin is from the earth; who tabernacle in cottages of clay, whoſe "life is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vaniſheth away," in the deepeſt humility wonder at, and admire the goodneſs of the Omnipotent, in deigning to take the ſmalleſt notice of them; and, with grateful hearts, cry out, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not conſumed, becauſe his compaſſions fail not.—I will bear the indignation of the Lord, becauſe I have ſinned againſt him, until he plead my cauſe, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I ſhall behold his righteouſneſs."—If you are thus humble and lowly under the correcting hand of God, take courage,

* Job xl. 4, 5. † Pſal. cxix. 75.

fear

fear not, for in in due time he will exalt you. "The Lord will not caſt off for ever: But though he cauſe grief, yet will he have compaſſion, according to the multitude of his mercies: For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."* God's children may be under the cloud; but they are not forgotten of him: they may be apparently deſerted; but are not ſo in reality. Was Iſrael forgotten in Egyptian bondage, or in Babyloniſh captivity?—Was Job forgotten on the dunghil? or Jeremiah in the dungeon? Was David caſt off in his exiles, his wanderings and diſtreſſes? or Lazarus neglected, even in the grave?—No: his hand unſeen ſupported them, and his bowels of ſympathy ſhared in their affliction. When their trials were ſoreſt, their ſupport was neareſt.——And ſo, to their ſweet experience, ſhall all his faithful ſervants find it. Verily, my brethren, "bleſſed are the poor in ſpirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven."†—Again,

4th. Let me adviſe you, however inconſiſtent and hard it may appear to fleſh and blood, to receive the chaſtiſements of your heavenly Father, not only with *humility*, but alſo with *thankfulneſs*.

* Lam. iii. 31, &c. † Mat. v. 3.

Did

Did you but rightly apprehend the motives which induce God to chaſtiſe you, ſo far would you be from murmuring and repining, that you would cheerfully kiſs the rod, welcome the hand that ſmites, and "count it all joy, when you fall into divers temptations."—You ought to be thankful, becauſe the corrections of your heavenly Father are marks of his paternal love and affection; for whilſt he chaſtiſes you, it is evident that he hath not cut you off from the privileges of his children, nor ranked you among baſtards.—You ſhould likewiſe be thankful that your condition is not worſe than it is. If you examine it attentively, you will find many ſweets intermingled with your bitters. Survey the world around you, and ſee how many, who leſs deſerve it, drink deeper in adverſity's unpleaſant cup than you do! Look about among your brethren, and fellow-followers of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and behold how many there are who live more holy and godly lives, who make the divine Law more the rule of their conduct, who do more for the glory of their Creator, and the benefit of mankind, in their day and generation, who are freer from ſin, fuller of piety, ſtronger in faith, and more fertile in good works, who are more penitent for their offences, more fervent in their devotions, and warmer

warmer in their love to God, and yet are under ſeverer trials than ever you were. Compare your lives, compare your ſituations with theirs, and you will be aſhamed to complain.——— "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the puniſhment of his ſins?" more eſpecially, when he is convinced that his puniſhment is leſs than his iniquities deſerve; yea, that the greateſt of his afflictions are leſs than the leaſt of his ſins?—Think ſeriouſly on theſe things, then will you not fail to praiſe the Lord for his diſtinguiſhing goodneſs towards you; and, with the royal Pſalmiſt, to declare, "Bleſſed is the man whom thou chaſteneſt, O Lord, and teacheſt him out of thy law; that thou mayeſt give him reſt from the days of adverſity:—for the Lord will not caſt off his people, neither will he forſake his inheritance."*—This *thankfulneſs* will greatly enable you to comply with our next Advice, namely,

5th. To bear affliction with *patience*, and with *reſignation* to the will of God.

This, we muſt acknowledge, is no eaſy matter. Fleſh and blood are apt to complain; and human nature has need of great ſupport, and of ſupernatural ſtrength, to bear the burthen, and

* Pſal. xciv. 12, 13, 14.

weather

weather out the ſtorm.—Let the following Conſiderations be uſed as means to beget in you thoſe neceſſary graces of *patience* and *reſignation*.

1ſt. Becauſe it is *God Almighty* who afflicts.—It is he who has a ſovereign right to do with all his creatures, as it ſeemeth good unto him. Man is in his hand, as clay in the hand of the potter, who can turn it into whatever form he pleaſes.—Who ſhall dare to call in queſtion the authority of the Moſt High, at whoſe frown the heavens and the earth tremble? "Why doſt thou ſtrive againſt him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters.—If he cut off, and ſhut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him?—Should it be according to thy mind? He will recompenſe it, whether thou refuſe, or whether thou chooſe." Seeing that there is no reſiſting his will, you ought patiently to ſubmit to his diſpenſations, and bear them with a humble reſignation: then the Lord, who "knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation," will, in due time, ſend you relief.

2dly. Bear affliction with *patience*, becauſe its *duration* can be but ſhort. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."* The dark hours of adverſity will ſoon

* Pſal. xxx. 5.

paſs

paſs away; and when the bright ſun-ſhine of proſperity ſhall again enlighten your paths, you will find its rays doubly enlivening, and a ten-fold reliſh added to all your future enjoyments. The bewildered traveller never beheld with ſuch gratitude, nor in ſuch raptures ſaw the ruddy morn approach, as after a dark and tedious night. And never will a Chriſtian be truly ſenſible of the joys which ariſe from the ſmiles of his Creator's countenance, till he has firſt perceived his frowns.

But perhaps ſome of you are ready to adopt the mournful language of the Prophet, and cry out, "Is there any ſorrow like unto my ſorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger."* Yes, ye troubled ſouls: look around you, and, as I told you before, you will find many who may thus ſpeak with more propriety. —But allowing your afflictions to be very great, and that they have been both long and ſevere; ſtill you are to exerciſe patience: the ſeverer they are, the ſooner they will end. And who can tell but that they are now come to a criſis? —Perhaps God is now about to turn your captivity; "to give you beauty for aſhes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praiſe for

* Lam. i. 12.

the

the ſpirit of heavineſs; and to make you reap in gladneſs the harveſt which you have ſown in tears.—In this caſe, how unbecoming is impatience!—How painful would the remembrance of it be!—And what ſhame would ſuch indecency of conduct beget in you, upon a change of your condition!

But take it even at the worſt, and ſuppoſe that your afflictions ſhall continue through life; yet, what is life?—a ſpan,—a vapour,—an empty bubble, which is ſoon broke, and appeareth no more!—Afflictions can endure at the longeſt but for a night: and then ſhall the day dawn, the gloom be diſperſed, and the "Sun of Righteouſneſs ariſe with healing in his wings."—Then farewel ſorrow and ſighing:—diſtreſs and pain ſhall be no more:——Welcome life, with never-ending pleaſures, and bliſs that cannot cloy!—This happineſs is expreſsly promiſed, and aſcertained to you in theſe words of the Redeemer himſelf; "Oh, thou afflicted, toſſed with tempeſt, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy ſtones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with ſapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleaſant ſtones.—In righteouſneſs ſhalt thou be eſtabliſhed: thou ſhalt be far from oppreſſion; for

for thou ſhalt not fear: and from terror; for it ſhall not come near thee."*—Again,

3dly. Another conſideration, which ought to make you *patient* and *reſigned* under affliction, is,—Becauſe *patience* will be a great mean of *ſhortening its duration*, and of making the burthen *lie much lighter* upon you.——As afflictions are ſent to bend and make pliable the ſtubborn ſoul, and to accuſtom it to patience and reſignation, ſo, the ſooner they have accompliſhed that end, the ſooner they will be removed. To the croſs, the peeviſh and diſcontented, nothing will be pleaſing or ſatisfactory: but to the mild, the gentle and contented ſpirit, even adverſity itſelf will become eaſy; I had almoſt ſaid *deſirable*; becauſe he conſiders God as its author, and welcomes whatever comes from his fatherly hand.—A perſon walking under a burthen, whilſt his mind is occupied in ſome pleaſing reverie, or in the enjoyment of even ſome imaginary bliſs, forgets his load, and is inſenſible to its weight. So the true Chriſtian, having his converſation in heaven, and his ſoul wrapt up in divine contemplation, forgets that afflictions lie heavy upon him: nor can they deſtroy that delightful intercourſe which he carries on with his God.—Happy the ſoul that is

* Iſa. liv. 11, 12, 14.

in ſuch a ſtate as this! Bleſſed the people whoſe God is JEHOVAH!—Once more,

4thly. Be *patient* and *reſigned* under the hand of God, for in due time your troubles will produce much *good fruit* in your ſouls.—Affliction drieth up the nouriſhment from the roots, and killeth the flowers of thoſe noxious weeds, which proſperity foſtered and cauſed to flouriſh; whilſt, at the ſame time, it ſtrengtheneth the genial plants of virtue. For as the rough glebe is torn up by the plough, and the ſtubborn clods broke by the harrows, till the ſoil is meliorated and made fit for the ſowing of ſeed; ſo, by affliction, is the human mind cultivated and made fit for cheriſhing the ſeeds of grace; which, if not neglected, will yield the peaceable fruits of righteouſneſs to all who are therewith exerciſed.—What theſe bleſſed fruits are, the Apoſtle of the Gentiles informs us, in his Epiſtle to the Galatians: "The fruits of the Spirit," ſays he, "are Love, Joy, Peace, Long-ſuffering, Gentleneſs, Goodneſs, Faith, Meekneſs and Temperance."*—What a glorious crop is here! and what a golden harveſt for the ſaints to reap!—Who would not, with that holy Apoſtle, "glory in tribulations? knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and

* Chap. v. 22, 23.

experience,

experience, hope; and hope maketh not aſhamed; becauſe the love of God is ſhed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghoſt, which is given unto us."*—Let this encourage you to comply with St. Paul's advice, to "lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make ſtraight paths for your feet, leſt that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."†—Then ſhall all the diſpenſations of Providence, whether proſperous or adverſe, be efficacious in promoting your higheſt intereſt, and your eternal felicity.

Laſtly, On this particular *Advice*—Let me urge the *Example* of the Saints, and virtuous men in every age of the world; and, above all, that of our bleſſed Lord and Saviour, as a *motive* to enforce the practice of *patience* and *reſignation* under affliction.

How did Job behave in the midſt of that unequalled calamity, and complicated diſtreſs, wherewith he was viſited?—When he was deprived of all earthly comforts, when he was bereaved of his children and friends, when he was robbed of all his wealth and ſubſtance, maliciouſly defamed, and baſely inſulted, and, withal, laboured under the moſt painful and loathſome diſeaſes of body,—did he murmur and repine?

* Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. † Heb. xii. 12, 13.

Did he arraign the juſtice of God, or tax his moral government? No: In humble ſubmiſſion, he thus expreſſes himſelf, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb; and naked ſhall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; bleſſed be the name of the Lord."* Did good old Eli fret and make a noiſe, when Samuel delivered him a moſt diſtreſsful meſſage, importing no leſs than the total deſtruction of all his houſe? No: He ſubmiſſively replied, "It is the Lord: let him do what ſeemeth him good."†—What a noble inſtance of reſignation do we find in David, when flying from the fury of his unnatural and rebellious ſon Abſalom? He calmly orders Zadok, the Prieſt, to return to Jeruſalem, with the ark of God, in theſe memorable words, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I ſhall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and ſhew me both it, and his habitation: But if he thus ſay, I have no delight in thee; behold, here I am, let him do to me as ſeemeth good unto him."‡

It would be endleſs to exhibit all, and needleſs to preſent you with more, of the examples of *patience* and *reſignation*, which every where abound in the ſacred writings. Permit me to

* Job i. 21. † 1 Sam. iii. 18. ‡ 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.

mention

mention only one or two, of perſons who were never bleſſed with the real knowledge of the true God, and the divine truths of his holy Religion.

It was a noble ſaying of the heathen Cleanthes, "Let the great Governor of the world put me into whatever ſtate he pleaſes, I am moſt ready to ſubmit to him."—And Epictetus thus ſpeaks, "In all thoſe conditions which ſeem ſore and grievous to me, I do thus order myſelf: I conſider that they come from God, and I endeavour not only to ſubmit, but to aſſent to him in all his dealings, not by way of compulſion, but out of choice."—A ſcholar of Pythagoras, deſiring that the Gods would give him whatever he ſhould aſk, was taught to ſay "Rather let me be willing to have whatever they pleaſe."—Theſe were truly great and generous ſouls; and noble inſtances of heathen virtue, thus to reſign up themſelves to God: And true it is, That many Chriſtians may go to ſchool and learn of them, how to behave, how to demean themſelves, under croſſes, and in a ſtate of calamity.

But, if you would have a perfect patter[n] you would have an example of every vi[rtue] for your imitation, then "look unto *Jeſus* Author and Finiſher of your faith; who the joy that was ſet before him, endure[d] c[roſs,]

croſs, deſpiſed the ſhame, and is ſet down at the right hand of the throne of God. Conſider him that endured ſuch contradiction of ſinners againſt himſelf, leſt ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Conſider what a glorious and exalted Perſonage he was, who came from heaven to earth to fulfil all righteouſneſs; to bear our ſins in his own body on the tree; and to ſet before us a pattern of all perfection.—His life was ſpotleſs and innocent; he always went about doing good: yet, never was ſorrow like unto his ſorrow. His whole life, from the cradle to the grave, was one continued ſeries of affliction: the firſt part of which he ſpent in meanneſs and obſcurity; "poor, deſpiſed and rejected of men; a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief."—After he entered on his publick miniſtry, he was perſecuted and forſaken: He ſuffered all that the rage and malice of men and devils could invent or inflict.—Betrayed by one diſciple, denied by another, forſaken by all; and, for a time, deſerted by his heavenly Father; which deſertion wounded his holy ſoul, more than all his other ſufferings: And, finally, he gave up the ghoſt by a moſt cruel and curſed death!—Thus did the Son of God, thus did our Redeemer ſuffer!—For what did he endure all this? Not for his own ſins; for he "did no ſin;

ſin; neither was guile found in his mouth."—For whom then? O aſtoniſhing grace! it was for ſinners; even for thoſe who imbrued their hands in his guiltleſs blood!*

Mark well, I pray you, the *patience* and *reſignation* with which the Son of God endured all this. When human nature ſhrunk back, and recoiled at the dreadful proſpect, his willing ſoul cheerfully ſubmitted, "ſaying, Father, not my will, but thine be done."†—"When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he ſuffered, he threatened not; but committed himſelf to him that judgeth righteouſly."—"He was oppreſſed, and he was afflicted; yet he opened not his mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the ſlaughter; and as a ſheep before her ſhearers is dumb, ſo he opened not his mouth."—"Though he were a ſon, yet learned he obedience by the things which he ſuffered: And being made perfect, he became the Author of eternal ſalvation to all that obey him."—But wherefore did the only begotten of the Father undergo all this? That he might redeem us from ſin, death and hell: and leave us an *Example* that we ſhould follow his ſteps.—How noble the example! How glorious the pattern! Go, Chriſtians, and, to the utmoſt of your power, imitate

* Luke xxiii. 34. † Luke xxii. 42.

your Lord and Maſter. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many ſons unto glory, to make the Captain of their Salvation perfect through ſufferings."—"In your patience poſſeſs ye your ſouls:"—"For in that he himſelf hath ſuffered being tempted, he is able to ſuccour them that are tempted."* Again,

6th. Another neceſſary *Advice* to ſuch as are under the correcting hand of God, is,—to *wait*, in hope and confidence, *his* good time of deliverance; and to uſe no unlawful means to haſten, or bring about, that wiſhed-for period.

God is *omnipotent*, and can, whenever he pleaſes, remove your affliction:—He is *omniſcient*, and therefore knows what time is beſt:—He is *merciful*, and will make it no ſeverer than is needful; nor permit it to continue longer than it ſhall have accompliſhed the end for which it was ſent.—Look then to him alone for deliverance: place your hope and confidence upon him: reſt aſſured that, when the appointed time is arrived, he will bring all your troubles to a happy iſſue: he will clothe you with the garments of ſalvation, and make your hearts to ſhout aloud for joy.—"Be patient therefore,

* Heb. ii. 18.

brethren,

brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the huſbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye alſo patient; ſtabliſh your hearts; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."*

Beware then, that you make no baſe, or ſervile compliance with the world. Diſdain diſſimulation and flattery; abhor the uſe of fraud or violence to extricate yourſelves; for theſe will only entangle you more and more, by adding ſin to your ſuffering.—Above all, guard againſt falling into deſpair. Let no ſuch temptation ever find a place in your heart: for it is one of the devil's chief artifices, by which he deſtroys weak and unwary ſouls. Be aſſured that he will employ every mean to bring you into a ſtate of deſpondency: If he can accompliſh this, he will, no doubt, ply you with further temptations; and endeavour to raiſe diſmal and diſtracting thoughts within you, by repreſenting your ſins as unpardonable, and exhibiting the *Juſtice* of God, whilſt he eclipſes his *Mercy*. By thoſe helliſh ſuggeſtions the enemy of mankind has driven many to lay violent hands on themſelves; who, by ſeeking to get rid of a few temporal inconveniencies, have hurried their ſouls into the pre-

* James v. 7, 8.

ſence

ſence of the Almighty, with all their ſin and guilt hanging about them; and thus, by their fool-hardineſs, hazard their everlaſting happineſs; if not abſolutely plunge themſelves into eternal miſery.—Beware of ſuch a conduct as this: for it is no leſs than doing deſpite to the Spirit of Grace, and a ſlighting of the divine mercy.—It is trampling under foot the Son of God; and a counting of the Redeemer's blood a weak and an unholy thing.—It is treaſon and rebellion againſt your ſovereign Lord and King, who ſent theſe afflictions upon you:—And to yourſelves—how ſhall I ſpeak it?—it is damnation and woe without end or bound; if infinite mercy prevent it not! Tremble at the very thought of diſtruſt in God's mercy; and be perſuaded that he is both able and willing to forgive the greateſt of ſinners, upon a ſincere repentance. For the truth of this, hear his own words: "As I live, ſaith the Lord God, I have no pleaſure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O houſe of Iſrael?"*—Our bleſſed Saviour alſo inviteth every weary and heavy-laden ſinner to come unto him, that he may find reſt:

* Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

and

and he has likewiſe promiſed, That whoſoever cometh to him he will in no wiſe caſt out.*

Having ſuch great and precious promiſes, and ſo full an aſſurance of God's love for you, wait *his* good time with humble ſubmiſſion; and then you ſhall find his mercy at hand to moderate your grief; his power to ſupport you; his wiſdom to counſel you; and his goodneſs to bring you from the furnace of affliction, as gold from the furnace of fire, greatly purified and refined; yea, to deliver you out of all adverſity.

7th. Another *Advice* proper for all who are mourning under the chaſtiſements of the Lord, and ready to faint under his rebukes, is,—to have immediate and frequent recourſe to *God* and his *Word*.—This will prove a ſovereign remedy in all their troubles, in every trial and temptation.

The rod of the Almighty ſhould ſend us to conſult his Oracles, which "were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." This was David's practice in his perplexities and diſtreſs. He ran to the Word of God; he meditated thereon, and was relieved.—"This," ſays he, "is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me."† And, from his

* John vi. 37. † Pſal. cxix. 5.

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own comfortable experience, he exhorts the afflicted to "wait on the Lord, and keep his way;"—"to be of good courage and he will ſtrengthen their heart."*

When terreſtrial objects wear a gloomy and forbidding aſpect, when your hopes ſeem to be cut off, then fail not to fly, on the wings of faith, to a Throne of Grace; and to proſtrate yourſelves at the footſtool of Mercy: There lay your complaints before the Lord, and by humble ſupplication and prayer, implore forgiveneſs, and ſue for relief.—This, when every other refuge failed, has often aſſuaged the ſorrows, dried up the tears, ſoothed the cares, poured balm into the wounds, and infuſed joy into the heart of the mourning and drooping Chriſtian!—There, with broken and contrite ſpirits, confeſs your ſins, and acknowledge his juſtice in all your chaſtiſements.—Thank him for his love in viſiting your faults with the rod; and not ſuffering you to go on in a courſe of ſin to your deſtruction.—Praiſe him for his goodneſs, in puniſhing you leſs than your iniquities have merited.—Promiſe him more dutiful allegiance, with more filial obedience; and reſolve, through divine aid, to live more than ever to his honour and glory.—Roll all your cares upon him, "and

* Pſal. xxvii. 14.

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lean not unto your own underſtanding."—— "Commit thy way unto the Lord; truſt alſo in him, and he ſhall bring it to paſs. He ſhall bring forth thy righteouſneſs as the light, and thy judgment as the noon day."—Renounce all other lords, who have formerly exerciſed an unjuſt dominion over you; and take the Lord Jeſus Chriſt alone for your Governor, for the Strength of your heart, and your everlaſting Portion.——Then ſhall you find that God, who knoweth how, and when, to deliver his children out of all their troubles, will alſo deliver you. He will ſatisfy your ſoul with good things; he will turn your heavineſs into mirth, and your mourning into ſongs of praiſe. He hath ſmitten, and he will heal; he hath wounded, and he will bind up.—Seek unto him, until he ſhall fill your mouth with laughter, and your tongue with ſinging.—Like Hannah, pour out your ſoul before the Lord: and, like her, you will be no more ſad.

Laſt. Let the *final happineſs* of the Righteous, and the *glorious Rewards* promiſed to the People of God, animate, encourage and ſupport you under all your afflictions.

One would hardly think it poſſible that the ſhort and tranſitory afflictions of this life ſhould diſturb or take away the peace of a pious ſoul; eſpecially,

eſpecially, when he knows that theſe light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*—If clouds and darkneſs have long overſhadowed you, the more pleaſant and delightful will the returning ſplendour of the ſun be. If your ſufferings have been great, the greater will be your reward.—But, how vaſt the difference! —An Apoſtle, who had ſeen and felt diſtreſs in every ſhape and kind, and who had alſo ſome foretaſte of the glory that ſhall be revealed in the ſaints, muſt undoubtedly be the beſt evidence.—And what is his opinion of the matter? His words are theſe, "I reckon that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that ſhall be revealed in us."† O how unſpeakably great is the goodneſs of our heavenly Father, in not only rewarding us for doing that which it was our duty to do, but alſo in enabling us to perform it!—How unequal the race, and the prize!—the toils of a day, and the pleaſures of eternity!—a night of ſorrow, and an endleſs life of joy!

It is but a very little while, O Saints, and your days of mourning ſhall be accompliſhed; and then "the ranſomed of the Lord ſhall return, and come to Zion with ſongs, and ever-

* 2 Cor. iv. 17. † Rom. viii. 18.

laſting

laſting joy upon their heads: they ſhall obtain joy and gladneſs, and ſorrow and ſighing ſhall flee away."*—"Bleſſed are they that *now* mourn; for they ſhall *then* be comforted.—Bleſſed are they who are perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."——How ſweet, how glorious the reſt that remaineth for the people of God! In thoſe bliſsful manſions which are prepared for their everlaſting habitation, "all tears ſhall be wiped from their eyes; and there ſhall be no more death, neither ſorrow nor crying; neither ſhall there be any more pain: for the former things are paſſed away."†

May God, for Chriſt's ſake, grant, That all of us, after having weathered out the ſtorms of adverſity, and paſſed through that ſea of troubles, which ſeparates the heavenly land from ours, may arrive ſafe in the haven of eternal reſt:—And may we ever experience it to be a faithful ſaying, That, "if we ſuffer with Chriſt, we ſhall alſo reign with him." Amen.

* Iſa. xxxv. 10. † Rev. xxi. 4.

SERMON

SERMON XVIII.

CHRIST THE BELIEVER'S LIFE; AND DEATH HIS GAIN.

PHILIPPIANS i. 21.

FOR TO ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST; AND TO DIE IS GAIN.

"TO die is gain!"——Strange aſſertion! Does not death deprive us of our life, bereave us of our comforts, and rob us of all terreſtrial enjoyments? Doubtleſs it does.—— How then can it be gain? If we may not flatly deny this propoſition of the Apoſtle, we may at leaſt ſay, It appears paradoxical.—We muſt indeed allow that death, as it affects nature, is an evil which nature abhors, which it ſhrinks from, and would by all means avoid: Nevertheleſs, as a mean for greatly bettering our condition, and for procuring us ſuperior advantages, it may be deſired.

But, allowing that death may be a *gain* to ſome, is it ſo to all? If St. Paul could ſay, "For *me* to die is gain," can all men, with

equal propriety, uſe the ſame language?—No, verily. It is the *Believer* in Chriſt Jeſus, and he only, to whom *death* is gain: To ſuch alone, whoſe *life* Chriſt is, can *death* be an advantage; and to ſuch only, as now make *godlineſs* their gain, will *death* be gain hereafter. In whatever condition a Believer is he is comfortable and bleſſed. While in life, he glorifies Chriſt by bringing forth plentifully the fruits of righteouſneſs; and in his death, which is the terminating of all his troubles, and the commencement of his happineſs, is the Saviour likewiſe glorified. The grace of Chriſt is manifeſted in his life, and the glory of Chriſt is manifeſted in his death: therefore, "to him to live is Chriſt; and to die is gain." This we ſhall endeavour, through divine aid, to prove in the ſequel of this diſcourſe.

And may God Almighty, of his infinite mercy, grant that each of us, when we arrive at the verge of an eternal world, may be ſo prepared for the laſt conflict with the King of Terrors, and ſo rejoiced with the proſpect before us, as to ſay with confidence, in the language of the Text, "To me to die is gain."

Theſe words contain two diſtinct propoſitions. FIRST, "To me to live is Chriſt:"—SECOND, "To me to die is gain."—Theſe we ſhall proceed

to

to illuſtrate and improve, for our edification and comfort.—And,

I. "To me to live is Chriſt."—Here we find the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles at a ſtand, in a ſtrait between two things, and undetermined which he ſhould chooſe. If *life* ſhould be his choice, then Chriſt would be glorified in the edification of his Church and People:—if *death*, then Chriſt would be glorified in the ſalvation of his ſervant.—The one would be profitable to the Philippians; and the other advantageous to himſelf. Therefore, ſeeing that Chriſt would be glorified, either by his life or his death, it was to him a matter of indifference whether he lived or died.—And as Chriſt was the *life* of the Apoſtle, ſo is he of all true Believers; for out of him *they* cannot live. Others there are, no doubt, who live, without Chriſt in the world, a mere animal, or natural life, for carnal and ſinful purpoſes: but ſuch, being alienated from the life of God, may, with great propriety, be ſaid to be "dead, even while they live."—The real life of a Chriſtian is founded on the life of Chriſt, as he himſelf thus teſtifies, "Becauſe I live, ye ſhall live alſo."*—And ſo ſaith his beloved diſciple, "He that hath the Son hath

* Jo. xiv. 19.

life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*—Yea, take it in whatever ſenſe you will, Chriſt is our life.—For, if we ſpeak of *natural life*, he is its author and efficient cauſe.—If we ſpeak of *ſpiritual life*, the life of grace, then he is of this life the fountain, from which it runs to all his people. To this St. Paul beareth teſtimony, ſaying, "I live; yet not I, but Chriſt liveth in me."† And as the head and members are animated by one and the ſame ſoul, ſo are Chriſt and his Church by one ſpirit.—Or if we ſpeak of *eternal life*, and the life of glory, this "our life is hid with Chriſt in God: And when Chriſt, who is our life, ſhall appear, then ſhall we alſo appear with him in glory."‡

Since Chriſt is *our life*, then ought he to be the grand object in which all our deſires centre. Our life, our time, our talents ſhould all be devoted to his ſervice; and our labours ſhould be ſo directed as that he may reap honour, and his children benefit, from them. Nothing ought to be ſo dear and precious to us as Chriſt: and, therefore, whether we live, we ſhould live to him; or whether we die, we ſhould die to him: becauſe "to this end he both died and roſe, and revived, that he might be the Lord both of the dead and living."

* 2 Jo. ver. 12. † Gal. ii. 20. ‡ Coloſſ. iii. 3, 4.

But

But with wicked men it is not ſo. They live not to *Chriſt*, but to *themſelves*. They follow their own inclinations; they walk after the imaginations of their own corrupt hearts; and, like Jeroboam, ſet up a worſhip which they deviſe of their own heart.* Their own eaſe, their own pleaſure and emolument are the things they chiefly ſeek to promote; and, in ſo doing, they are guided by their own carnal wiſdom. When Religion ſtands in the way of their worldly purſuits, they puſh it aſide; and will rather withdraw their allegiance from the Almighty, than be thwarted in their purpoſes: They, in effect, ſay with Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I ſhould obey his voice?"† not conſidering, that whilſt they neglect his glory, they endanger, yea, forfeit their own ſalvation.

What is it then for Chriſt to be our *life?* and for a man to ſay, Verily, "to me to live is Chriſt?"—It is to acknowledge him, cheerfully and heartily, to be our Lord and Maſter, our King and Governor; and to do all things for his glory.—It is to value our life, not chiefly for itſelf, but as it regards the ſervice of our God; ſaying, with the Apoſtle, "I count not my life dear unto myſelf, ſo that I might finiſh my courſe with joy, and the Miniſtry which I

* 1 Kings xii. 33. † Exod. v. 2.

have received of the Lord Jeſus."*—This is for a man to ſay, "To me to live is Chriſt;" my ſtudies, my labours are all directed to bring glory and honour to his name: the deſires of my ſoul are towards him; and all my attention is engaged in conſidering by what means I ſhall moſt promote his intereſt and kingdom among men: my thoughts are employed in contriving how I may "live the reſt of my time in the fleſh;" not to mine own luſts, but to my Lord's will, to whom my life, my ſoul, and my ſalvation, were dearer than his own life. Since his blood was the price of my ranſom, his glory ſhall be my chief care: And as it was one great end of my Saviour's death, "that they which live ſhould not henceforth live unto themſelves, but unto him who died for them and roſe again," ſo it ſhall be my conſtant endeavour to promote his gracious deſign, by glorifying him in my body, and in my ſpirit, which are his.

Thus we ſee what it is for *Chriſt* to be *our life*, and for a man to ſay, "To me to live is Chriſt."—But, as formerly obſerved, Believers in the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, and they only, have a right to adopt the words of our Text and apply them to themſelves. None, but ſuch as put their whole truſt and confidence in him, and

* Acts xx. 24.

are

are deſirous that he ſhall be magnified in them, whether by life, or by death, can ſay, "To me to live is Chriſt." To thoſe only, whom the Father hath given him, he is life. To the ſoul that longs after him "he is precious."—To others he is a ſtumbling ſtone, and a rock of offence; and his Goſpel is "the ſavour of death unto death."

Having ſaid ſo much on this part of our ſubject, I ſhall now proceed to illuſtrate the Apoſtle's SECOND Propoſition in our Text, which, if not wholly inconſiſtent with the general opinion of mankind, muſt at leaſt appear ſtrange and paradoxical:—"To die is gain!"

II. If this aſſertion of the Apoſtle is true, how comes it that mankind, in general, have ſuch a ſtrong averſion to death?—Moſt men look upon it as the worſt of evils; and uſe the greateſt precaution to retard its approach.—True, ſeveral ancient philoſophers have ſaid a great many fine, ſoothing and flattering things concerning death. They have painted it in fair colours; and deſcribed it to much advantage:—They have repreſented it as a *debt* or *tribute*, which we owe to Nature; as the *end* of all our miſeries; as the *cure* of all our maladies, our languors and diſeaſes: They have ſpoken of it

as a *reſt*, as a quiet and ſoft *repoſe*, after all our labours, and toils; as an *harbour*, and *ſafe haven*, after all our fears, our troubles and toſſings, on life's tempeſtuous ocean: but few, or none of them, ever went ſo far as to call it a *gain*. The learned diſciple of Gamaliel, or rather the pious ſcholar of Jeſus Chriſt, was the firſt who repreſented it as gainful, and greatly to be deſired.

But, after all the favourable things which either St. Paul, or the philoſophers of ancient Greece and Rome, ſuch as Socrates and Plato, Epictetus, Seneca, Antoninus, or all of them, have ſaid, or written, on this ſubject, ſtill it ſeems ſtrange to expect gain from a thing the very nature of which conſiſts in loſs and deprivation. What, of all his former poſſeſſions, can a man retain after death? Or what part of his ſubſtance can he carry with him into the grave? He no ſooner ſhuts his eyes upon the light of this world, than his tenants and dependants ceaſe to regard him: nor can he derive any further benefit from his lands and revenues.

Suppoſe a man, according to a judgment at law given againſt him, ſtripped of all he poſſeſſed; his houſe taken from him; his cattle ſeized in the fields; his corn in his granaries, and his money in his purſe; yea, his clothes pulled from off

off his back, and his perſon thrown naked and bare into the dark dungeon of a frightful priſon; would any ſay that this man was a gainer? Hardly.—Well, juſt ſuch another judgment is death. It bereaves us of all.—It leaves a man no more land than his grave, no other houſe than his coffin, and no more clothes than his ſhroud. —In the one caſe, friends, and the generoſity of neighbours, may releaſe him, may repair his fortune, and place him again in eaſy circumſtances; as was the caſe with Job.—But in the other, friends and neighbours avail nothing: for, in death, they are loſt, as well as eſtates. Father and mother, brethren and ſiſters, wife and children, relatives the neareſt and deareſt, all part at the gates of the grave; and ſhall never meet again, "till the heavens be no more."

Whilſt there is life there is hope.——And though a man may have loſt all his wealth and ſubſtance, together with his friends and relatives, he ſtill poſſeſſes himſelf: and, by his knowledge, his labour and induſtry, may, in time, make up his loſſes. But, in death, he has not even this privilege; for it is the very loſing of a man's ſelf.—The whole fabrick is torn to pieces; no head left to form plans for future happineſs; nor hands to execute them. His two diſtinct parts are ſeparated, and removed

moved from each other, as far as heaven, or hell, is diſtant from the grave!—Now, after all theſe loſſes, where can we poſſibly find gain? It certainly appears not, at firſt ſight: but gain there muſt be; for the Oracles of Truth have declared it: and where it lies we muſt endeavour to find out.

Let us then begin our reſearches with viewing death as an *enemy*; for ſo he is ſtiled by the Apoſtle;* and by Chriſt himſelf he was reckoned as ſuch, when his human nature would fain have declined the combat with him.†

This view of death, as an *enemy*, is the very worſt that a Believer can have of him; and, even as a foe, he may gain by him. What! gain by an enemy; when even the moſt intimate friends keep aloof from one another, as ſoon as they diſcover their intereſts to be in oppoſition?—Yes, my friends, the nearneſs of an enemy puts us more on our guard, and makes us more wary and cautious in our words and actions.—The preſence of a malicious foe, that daily watches for our halting, makes us more circumſpect in our deportment.—When David was eyed, and perſecuted by Saul, his avowed enemy, he walked with more circumſpection, prayed more fervently, truſted God more confidently, and

* 1 Cor. xv. 26. † Matt. xxvi. 39.

guarded

guarded his lips more watchfully, whilſt the wicked were before him, than he afterwards did, when ſettled on his throne in peace.—In like manner, death, by his nearneſs, makes us more on our guard againſt ſin; more fearful to offend God; more ſolicitous to make our peace with Heaven; more dead to the world and alls its periſhing enjoyments; more diligent to prepare for eternity, and to "lay up a good foundation againſt the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life;" and more anxious to ſecure for our everlaſting abode, "an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that paſſeth not away."

This, you may ſay, is gain from an enemy at a diſtance; but is there any to be gotten from him, when under his power? Yes, verily: For "when a man's ways pleaſe the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him;" yea, to be his covert, and protectors, as he formerly made Moab to his outcaſts of Iſrael.—Though death be an enemy, he is a conquered enemy. Chriſt hath vanquiſhed him, weakened his power, plucked out his ſting, and can cauſe his malice to work for our happineſs. Was not the fiſh that ſwallowed up Jonah an enemy? and yet, by it he was preſerved from death: for he muſt needs have been drowned, had not the fiſh carried him ſafe to the ſhore.—Were not the

the red ſea, and the river Jordan, enemies to all who ſhould throw themſelves into the boſom of their waves? And yet, by ſo doing, Iſrael obtained deliverance from the thraldom of Egypt, victory over Pharaoh, and poſſeſſion of Canaan, the land promiſed to their fathers for an everlaſting inheritance.

While Believers continue in this embodied ſtate, they are abſent from the Lord, and kept from enjoying their heavenly inheritance. Here, like Jonah, we are caſt into a raging and tempeſtuous ſea; and death, like the whale, ſwallows us up, and carries us to the peaceful ſhores of Emmanuel's country. He reſcues us from the cruel bondage of Satan; from the ſnares and temptations of ſin; from the tyranny of our own unruly paſſions; from perſecutions and ſufferings; from the many fiery ſerpents which moleſt us in our journey through the wilderneſs of this world; and, finally, he brings us to the land of eternal reſt.—Thus, Chriſtians, as the waters of Marah were ſweetened, by the tree caſt into them, ſo death is deprived of its bitterneſs and deadly quality, by the croſs of Chriſt; and is thereby rendered grateful, ſalutary and gainful to Believers.

Hitherto we have only viewed death as repreſented to us by the *ſpirit of bondage*, as a grim

grim and ghaſtly enemy, armed with terrors, to keep the ſoul under continual fear and dread.—Let us now conſider him as one of thoſe good things which Chriſt has beſtowed upon us, and behold him as a *friend*, reconciled to us through Jeſus, our Peace-maker and our Head.—In this light, he performs for us the kindeſt offices. He comes as a nurſe to carry the child into the arms of his mother; and as a meſſenger, ſent by a father to bring his beloved ſon home to his houſe and family.—He conſigns our mortal part to the ſilent tomb, there to be purified and refined; with a ſtrict charge to keep it ſafe, until Chriſt ſhall require an exact account of what was there depoſited: for none of his children are forgotten in the grave: he keeps all their bones; and to him their duſt is precious. A temporary confinement, in the houſe appointed for all living, is no puniſhment to Believers; for the Son of God, by his deſcent into its dark chambers, hath ſanctified it, hath changed it from a priſon into a ſafe and quiet reſting place, where the bodies of his ranſomed ones may enjoy their Sabbath, till called forth to life and glory everlaſting, "Write, ſaith the Spirit, Bleſſed are the dead which die in the Lord;—they reſt from their labours;"—"they enter into peace;—they reſt in their beds."

But

But from what do the redeemed of the Lord reſt? They reſt from the *power* and *dominion of ſin*; they are liberated from its cruel tyranny, and eaſed of that grievous burthen under which they had long groaned; and which had often forced from them this ſad and ſore complaint, "There is no reſt in my bones, becauſe of my ſin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long."*—While in this militant ſtate, God's people are ſeldom, or never, at eaſe, or in peace. There is a conſtant warfare kept up between the ſpirit and the fleſh; each ſtriving for the maſtery. But ſuch an hold has ſin got, and ſo deeply rooted is corruption in the nature of man, that it can never be totally ſubdued and quite deſtroyed, until his earthly tabernacle is taken to pieces, and wholly demoliſhed. Then, this body of ſin being deſtroyed, Believers are made perfect.

Nor do thoſe who die in the Lord only reſt from the tyranny and ſlavery of *ſin*, but likewiſe from the ſore temptations, the cruel buffetings and furious aſſaults of *Satan*, their implacable enemy.—How hard, how dreadful a

* Pſal. xxxviii. 3, 4, 6.

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thing it is to enter the liſts with this avowed adverſary of mankind, and to encounter this roaring lion, when the Almighty is pleaſed to lengthen his chain, and permit him to attack the ſervants of God, none, but thoſe who have had the experience, can tell! What ſinful doubts and diſmal fears, what horrid ſuggeſtions, he raiſes in their ſouls! What fiery darts he hurls againſt poor ſinners, in order to accompliſh their deſtruction, the example and experience of many of the ſaints ſufficiently teſtify. Yea, ſo violent have his aſſaults been, that their ſouls, at times, have, with Job, "choſen ſtrangling, and death rather than life."*—But, being once removed beyond his reach, their warfare is ended, and they enjoy the rewards of victory.

By death, Believers alſo reſt from the cares and anxieties of *life*; from the ſorrows and pains incident to this ſtate of *mortality*; from the unkind uſage and cruel perſecutions of the *world*. —Having laid aſide the garments of fleſh, they are no more diſquieted with what is doing under the ſun. The pernicious example, and the too often fatal enticements of ſinners, have no effect upon them: nor doth the beholding of their filthy converſation any longer afflict, or grieve their righteous ſpirits. The fear of per-

* Chap. vii. 15.

ſecution

ſecution, and the dread of cruel treatment from an ungodly world, no more affright and alarm them: for in their quiet retreat, "the wicked ceaſe from troubling; and there the weary be at reſt. There the priſoners reſt together; they hear not the voice of the oppreſſor."*

Beſides all theſe advantages, Chriſt's faithful followers likewiſe reſt from the hardſhips and difficulties of *duty*; from thoſe ſevere ſtruggles which the heart, deſirous to keep cloſe to God, often has with indwelling ſin and corruption, which powerfully ſtrive to withdraw it from him who ought to be the ſole object of its love and affection. Such imperfect creatures are we, that although "the ſpirit be willing, the fleſh is weak:" and though "to will is preſent with us, how to perform that which is good we find not."

In fine, as the Righteous are delivered from *paſt evils*, reſcued from the power and dominion of all their enemies, eaſed of their burthens, and extricated from all their difficulties, ſo are they, in kindneſs, taken away from *the evil to come*; leſt their eyes ſhould behold that which would cauſe ſorrow and anguiſh in their ſouls.

Having thus mentioned ſome of thoſe *evils* from which death delivers the people of God,—

* Job iii. 17, 18.

let

let us next conſider ſome of the kind things he does for them, and a few of the bleſſings which he brings to them;—and we ſhall then be convinced that the Apoſtle Paul had good ground for aſſerting, "To me to die is gain."

As death deprives us of one life, ſo, in lieu thereof, he tranſlates us to another, a better, and infinitely more to be deſired. Our preſent life is fleeting and periſhing; but that which awaits us, in the world to come, is permanent and immortal. Natural life is every moment expoſed to death, and ſubject to diſſolution; but our ſpiritual life, "which is hid with Chriſt in God," is always ſafe; it cannot be loſt; for over it death has no power. Natural life, like the waters of Jordan, falls into a dead ſea; but ſpiritual life, like the waters of the ſanctuary, which, from being ſhallow at firſt, grow deeper, and become an impaſſable river, ſprings up, runs, and flows, through perpetual ages.——Again,

By death, "the ſpirits of juſt men are made perfect." The droſs, the corruption with which they are here ſullied and debaſed, is ſeparated and done away. They are fitted for the enjoyment of the celeſtial paradiſe; and for participating in the pleaſures peculiar to the ſaints in light.—Death brings us our white robes, and

adorns our brow with the triumphal crown.—He delivers up our ſouls waſhed, perfumed and adorned, that they may be preſented to God, holy and without blemiſh, not having ſpot, or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing.—In this, is not death the Believer's gain?

And, as death conſigns our bodies to the grave, ſo does it ſafely keep our relicts therein depoſited. It will give a juſt and faithful account of all that it receives; and will reſtore *incorruptible* what it received in corruption; and in *glory* what it received in weakneſs and diſhonour. At the appointed time, the day of reſurrection, it will ſay to the friends of Jeſus, as the jailor of Philippi formerly ſaid to St. Paul, The Lord "hath ſent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace*."—Verily the grave has nothing in it that is dreadful to the Chriſtian. "In the tomb of Jeſus are diſpelled all the horrors that are to be found in the tomb of nature. In the grave of nature I ſee night and impenetrable darkneſs: in the grave of Jeſus, I behold light and life. In the tomb of nature I ſee the puniſhment of my ſins: in the tomb of Jeſus I ſee my ſins expiated. In the grave of nature I behold the ſad deſtiny of Adam and all his wretched poſterity: *duſt thou art*;

* Acts xvi. 36.

and

and unto duſt ſhalt thou return: in the grave of Jeſus my ſoul breaks forth in theſe joyful accents of praiſe and triumph, *O death! where is thy ſting? O grave! where is thy victory? The ſting of death is ſin; and the ſtrength of ſin is the law: but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jeſus Chriſt:—who by his death has deſtroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil; and delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their life-time ſubject to bondage.*"*—Yes, my brethren, the Son of God hath delivered us from the puniſhment of ſin; of courſe, death is no more a puniſhment.—The death of Chriſt has totally changed the nature of ours.—Once it was a poiſon, now it is a medicine. Once it deſtroyed ſinners, by a juſt and equitable deſtruction; but now it deſtroys ſin by a juſt and commendable parricide: for as ſin brought forth death, ſo this offſpring cauſes the deſtruction of the parent. The death of the body is the death of ſin; and the extinction of the old Adam puts a final period to our unhallowed paſſions.

Another friendly office which death performs for the people of God is, the bringing them *home* to their native country and their paternal inheritance.—Here below, the ſaints are pil-

* Saurin.

grims, ſtrangers and ſojourners. They live in a foreign country, and among enemies, who are governed by different and oppoſite principles; therefore they are hated and undervalued by them. Here the heirs of heaven tabernacle in cottages of clay, and have no permanent abode: But there is prepared for them "a city that hath foundations; and a kingdom which cannot be ſhaken."—Here they are as branches ſevered from the vine; and as members ſeparated from the head. True, we are even now ſaid to be *in* Chriſt, and Chriſt *in* us:—but in heaven we ſhall be *with* Chriſt, and behold his glory, which, as the Apoſtle tells us, "is far better" than our preſent ſituation.——Here we are in the ſame family, and belong to the ſame houſehold; but we are in the loweſt, in the meaneſt apartments, and engaged in menial offices. By death we are advanced, we are conducted to the upper chambers, brought to the banqueting-houſe, introduced into better company, with whom our joy ſhall be full; and where our "eyes ſhall behold the King in his beauty;" where we ſhall know even as we are known; and where we ſhall enjoy Him, who "is fairer than the ſons of men," perfectly and eternally. —Such being the caſe, how amiable an aſpect will even the pale monarch wear, when he comes

comes only as a meſſenger of peace, to releaſe you from the mortal clog that retards your flight to your Father's dwellings!—How ſhort will the paſſage through the wilderneſs ſeem, when you know that the promiſed land borders ſo cloſe upon it!—How ſmooth the ſwellings of Jordan, when your Lord promiſes they ſhall never overwhelm you!—And how lightſome "the valley of the ſhadow of death," when the Shepherd of Iſrael comforts and conducts you with his rod and ſtaff! Verily, death to the children of God is gain!

If ſo, then who, of that happy number, would not rather deſire than fear it? The greateſt evil it can do them is to conſign their clay-built tabernacle to its parent earth, and their immortal part to the bliſsful manſions of glory! This being the caſe, how deſirable the change which our Father and Brother, your late worthy Paſtor, the Reverend JOHN PARTICK, has now made, by being tranſlated from a world of ſin and ſorrow to the peaceful regions of pure delight, unmingled joy, and endleſs felicity!*

* Mr Patrick died on the 30th of July 1791. And this Sermon is here publiſhed at the particular requeſt of ſome of the ſurviving Members of that Church, in which he ſo long and ſo faithfully miniſtered.

Was it not owing to ſelfiſhneſs, as well as to a weakneſs of nature, and that ſtrong deſire we have to retain and hold faſt our earthly comforts, we would, without a murmuring word, give them back to the ſovereign Benefactor, from whom we received them: yea, cheerfully part with our neareſt friends, and moſt beloved relatives, the greateſt of all terreſtrial bleſſings, when it pleaſes our heavenly Father to call them hence: And, more, eſpecially, when we have the greateſt reaſon to believe that they die in the Lord, and ſleep in Jeſus.

That our departed Father and Friend "died in faith," and now reſts from his pious labours in the boſom of his Saviour and his God, there can ſcarcely remain a doubt, with thoſe who knew the tenor of his life and converſation.—He was one of the few who particularly dedicate themſelves to the ſervice of God; who cheerfully ſpend their time, and employ their talents, in promoting the honour of their divine Maſter, and the happineſs of mankind, to the utmoſt extent of their abilities, in that ſituation in which it pleaſes Providence to place them.

As to the character of this faithful ſervant of Chriſt, who is gone to receive the rewards promiſed to all ſuch, whether conſidered in a *religious*, or in a *moral* light, it was fair, and, ſo far

as

as can be ſaid of fallible man, in this imperfect ſtate, unblameable. It was ſuch as can receive no additional luſtre by any thing I can poſſibly ſay. This will be acknowledged by many who now hear me, who have known his worth and value much longer than I have; although, for a number of years I have been happy in his acquaintance.

To enter particularly into the character of this departed Worthy would require more time than at preſent you would allow me; and talents for illuſtration ſuperior to thoſe which I poſſeſs. —Unmeaning compliments, and unmerited encomiums, I could never think of beſtowing on any man, however well they might have been received. It cannot then be ſuppoſed that I ſhould paſs them on the memory of one who was greatly above them; and who, in life, would have ſpurned at ſuch things. I ſhall therefore confine my obſervations, at this time, to *one* or *two* ſtriking features in the character of this "Man of God," which were conſpicuous to all who had the opportunity of attending to his publick and private deportment, and which are highly worthy of our imitation,

As a Miniſter of Chriſt, he was, like Peter of old, warm and zealous in the cauſe of his divine Maſter. Though, in other things, mild, gentle,

and eaſy to be perſuaded, he was ſtedfaſt, reſolved, and unmoveable in what he, from his heart, believed to be the real, the true and orthodox doctrines of the Goſpel. Nor would he ever give up the principles he had learned from Scripture, and carefully examined, by the unerring Oracles of Truth, to the opinion, or arguments of any man; holding the Word of God to be the only ſtandard of Faith and Morals.

But, whilſt he was ſtrictly evangelical in his principles, he entertained the moſt liberal ſentiments of others, who differed from him in ſome things: providing they acknowledged the great and leading truths of Chriſtianity, ſuch as the *divinity*, the *mediatorial offices*, the *ſatisfaction*, and *interceſſion* of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt.—But as for thoſe who "denied the Lord that bought them," and ſought to rob the eternal Son of the Higheſt of his deity, his honours and divine perfections, he held their principles in abhorrence: With ſuch he would hold no communion or fellowſhip; nor once bid them God ſpeed.

To hear, that the intereſt and cauſe of Chriſt flouriſhed and proſpered in the world, revived his heart, and rejoiced his ſpirit. But, when he heard that infidelity gained ground, that hereſy, error and immorality were ſpreading in the Church which the Redeemer purchaſed with his

his own blood, that it might be unto "himſelf a glorious Church, not having ſpot or wrinkle, or any ſuch thing; but that it ſhould be holy and without blemiſh;" then he was either oppreſſed with ſilent grief, or his zeal for his Saviour incited him to expreſs his diſapprobation in the boldeſt, but juſtifiable language.

He was alſo a great enemy to ſchiſms and diviſions in the Church of Chriſt; well knowing that ſuch things tended to deſtroy that very cauſe and intereſt which the ſchiſmaticks pretend to ſupport. Nor could he ever approve of people breaking off from an eſtabliſhed Church, in which they had been brought up, without the moſt cogent and ſatisfactory reaſons.

In his miniſterial duties he was moſt punctual and diligent; neglecting no opportunity whereby he might be might be uſeful in the Lord's vineyard.—And ſo much did he love his Maſter's work, that, notwithſtanding his memory had been failing, and his bodily ſtrength declining, for three years prior to his diſſolution, he ſtill continued to preach, at leaſt once, every Lord's-day, to his flock and people, whom he ſincerely loved, until about nine months before his death.

As a *ſcholar* and a *man of ſcience* he was reſpectable, and ſuperior to many; having had his

his diploma of *Maſter of Arts*, from the Univerſity of St. Andrew, where he proſecuted his academical ſtudies, at an early ſeaſon of life. But however reſpectable for his knowledge in human learning, he was much more ſo for the knowledge he had acquired of Chriſt, and the myſteries of godlineſs: In this divine learning he greatly excelled; and was at much pains to communicate it to others.

With reſpect to his moral character, it was, to the beſt of my knowledge, unimpeachable and highly exemplary.—It was pure and perfect, as far as can be ſaid of any man, in this ſinful and imperfect ſtate. To this, I verily believe, you, who have known him longeſt and moſt intimately, will readily ſubſcribe. Nor is it greatly to be wondered at; for this noble precept of the Apoſtle was always before him, "giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godlineſs; and to godlineſs brotherly kindneſs; and to brotherly kindneſs charity;"* and by carefully endeavouring to follow it, he poſſeſſed thoſe Chriſtian graces in an eminent degree. In whatever view we place him, we find him to anſwer Ariſtotle's character of an

* 2 Pet. i. 5, &c.

honeſt

honeſt man, ανηρ τετραγωνος, "a four ſquare man," who had a baſis of juſtice and integrity to ſtand upon in every capacity.—Nay, my brethren, I may venture to ſay of our departed Friend, what our bleſſed Lord ſaid of Nathanael, "Behold an Iſraelite indeed, in whom *was* no guile."*—Sincerity, truth, and Chriſtian ſimplicity were ſtriking features in the character of this good man.—But wherefore ſhould I detain you, by mentioning what every one knows, who had the happineſs of his acquaintance?—Like a Chriſtian he lived; and as a Chriſtian he died.—Like Enoch, he walked with God on earth; and, like him, is now tranſlated into the bliſsful manſions of glory.—Who would not wiſh to partake of ſuch happineſs?—Who would not be ready to ſay, "Let me die the death of the Righteous; and let my laſt end be like his?"

For a conſiderable time, and particularly for a few months before his deceaſe, his earthly tabernacle decayed apace, and gradually waſted away; but without any ſickneſs, pain, or uneaſy ſenſations; ſo that it may be truly ſaid, He went down "to the grave, in a full old age, like as a ſhock of corn cometh in in his ſeaſon." For this mild and gentle treatment he frequently expreſſed his gratitude, and the un-

* Jo. i. 47.

common

common obligations he was under, to his heavenly Father, to whoſe diſpoſal he perfectly re-reſigned himſelf; and, without emotions of fear, doubt or anxiety, he patiently waited for the time when his change ſhould come. He knew that the work on which his Lord had commiſſioned him was finiſhed; and therefore only waited for the call to appear before him, that he might receive the reward of his labours; fully convinced, with the aged Apoſtle of the Gentiles, that "for *him* to die was gain."

If ſo, why mourn and grieve becauſe of his departure? He verily joins no more with us in our worſhipping aſſemblies here below: but, being made a pillar in the Temple above, whence he ſhall go out no more for ever, he bears a part in the purer worſhip of the heavenly Sanctuary; free from all thoſe weakneſſes and infirmities, all that languor and wearineſs which now diminiſh, interrupt, and marr the fervour of our devotion.—O, how different the ſociety! —how changed the aſſembly, from that with which he was wont to join in this place, and in our other earthly *Bethels!*—Inſtead of our low and groveling ſtrains, he joins in loud hoſannas, with Cherubim and Seraphim, Angels and Archangels, yea, with all the glorious, the innumerable multitude of Chriſt's ranſomed Ones,

"unto

"unto Him that ſitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."——Happy ſouls, to be thus for ever with the Lord!—Let us, my Chriſtian Friends, let us double our diligence to obtain the ſame ineffable and immortal felicity. Let us follow the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, whitherſoever he ſhall lead; and imitate our departed Father and brother, as far as he was an imitator of Chriſt: then for us to die will be unſpeakable and eternal gain.

It is a comely, it is a pleaſant ſight to ſee old age adorned with piety, and the hoary head exhibiting a crown of glory.—But ah! how few among the ſons of men arrive at the goodly old age of your venerable Paſtor.*——By far the greateſt part of mankind ſtop ſhort in their courſe, and are conſigned to the dark, the ſilent, the inglorious cells of corruption, "with their breaſts full of milk, and their bones moiſtened with marrow."—As the time of our departure hence is uncertain, and as we know not how ſoon we may be ſummoned into the world of ſpirits, it behoves us to be always on our guard, and conſtantly in a ſtate of preparation.—When

* He had nearly completed the 85th year of his age, and had been more than 50 years Miniſter of the ſame Congregation.

this

this is the caſe, the meſſenger of death will not greatly alarm, nor diſcompoſe our ſpirits.

In our departed Brother, we have witneſſed how calm and tranquil the evening of life is to the righteous.—Like the ſun, verging downward amidſt the ſtillneſs and ſerenity of a clear ſummer's evening, and gradually leaving our hemiſphere to enlighten other worlds, the aged Believer, amidſt placid and pleaſing reflections on a well ſpent life, and rejoicing in the delightful proſpect before him, gently deſcends to the confines of the world of ſpirits; and, caſting a look of complacency behind, bids adieu to all terreſtrial objects: And no ſooner does he ſhut his eyes, upon the light that ſhall be turned into darkneſs, than he opens them in the celeſtial country, where the ſun goeth not down; and where no night ſhall terminate the happy day.—"Bleſſed are the dead, which die in the Lord:"—For "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for" their eternal felicity.

SERMON

SERMON XIX.

THE HAPPINESS OF THE SAINTS, IN THEIR GLORIFIED STATE, INCONCEIVABLE.

1 CORINTHIANS ii. 9.

EYE HATH NOT SEEN, NOR EAR HEARD, NEITHER HAVE ENTERED INTO THE HEART OF MAN, THE THINGS WHICH GOD HATH PREPARED FOR THEM THAT LOVE HIM.

NOR ſhall the eyes of mortal men ever ſee, neither ſhall their ears hear, nor their hearts conceive the glorious things which await the righteous, in the kingdom of their heavenly Father, until "mortality be ſwallowed up of life." Then ſhall they ſee, and hear, and know all that their hearts deſired to be informed of, in this land of darkneſs and uncertainty.—Although it is but little that the moſt enlightened mind can know, or the moſt enlarged heart conceive, of the glories of the celeſtial ſtate, in compariſon to that knowledge which the ſaints in light ſhall attain, yet, there is ſtill ſuch manifeſtations

manifeſtations given thereof as to make us long after a more perfect knowledge, and deſire to comprehend more fully what we now ſee indiſtinctly, through a dark medium, and only in part. It is not granted to man, while in the earthly tabernacle, to comprehend the myſteries of the ſpiritual kingdom, or to fathom the abyſs of divine Wiſdom. That happineſs is reſerved for a more perfect and enlightened ſtate; when the film ſhall be taken from our eyes; when clouds and darkneſs ſhall not intervene betwixt the eye and the object; when the ways of Providence, now vailed in obſcurity, ſhall be fully diſplayed; when the wiſdom of Omnipotence ſhall ſhine forth with amazing luſtre, and God be juſtified in all his doings.

Ah! my brethren, how ſmall a portion of his ways is underſtood by finite and created beings! —How faint and imperfect our ideas of celeſtial bliſs!—When we attempt to liſp out a few broken ſentiments, and expreſs a few vague thoughts, on the happineſs which God hath prepared, and Chriſt hath purchaſed, for his ranſomed Ones in the world to come, we are under the neceſſity of borrowing images from every thing that can delight and pleaſe us.—We call to our aid the *ſoul* with her endowments and perfections;—the *body* with its ſymmetry and beauty;

beauty ;—*nature* with her richeſt treaſures ;—*ſociety* with its pleaſures ;—the *church* with her triumphs ; and *eternity* with its endleſs rounds :—then, from all theſe, and ſuch like, we attempt to form ſome idea of the heavenly happineſs.—But after all, the moſt perfect image we can poſſibly form of it muſt ſtill be rude, unfiniſhed and vaſtly defective.—Notwithſtanding of this, we ſhall now endeavour to give ſome faint repreſentation of it, as God ſhall pleaſe to enable.

And may HE, whoſe Spirit reveals to men the hidden things of God, now grant us ſuch a pleaſing view of the celeſtial Canaan, and the bleſſedneſs of its inhabitants, as to raiſe in our ſouls a longing and ardent deſire to reach that happy country, and to partake of its ineffable pleaſures.

The words of our Text may not immediately reſpect the happineſs of heaven and a future ſtate, but might have been primarily ſpoken of the Goſpel times, and of the bleſſings to be enjoyed in this life by thoſe who love God.—But, from them, a ſtrong argument may be drawn to prove the unſpeakable happineſs of the Saints hereafter. Though many of God's people, in the acting of their faith and love upon him, do now taſte joys ineffable, yet, they are nothing,

when compared to thoſe which the ranſomed of the Lord ſhall enjoy in his heavenly kingdom.——To that ſuperior bleſſedneſs of the Saints in light we ſhall confine our preſent meditations.

Before we attempt to ſpeak of the glory and felicity of the heavenly ſtate, it may not be improper briefly to obſerve, That this unſpeakable happineſs is not prepared for all men, without diſtinction.—It is for ſuch only as are *the friends of God*, and "the called according to his purpoſe." Free as Goſpel grace is, it is not to be thrown away, and abuſed, by being laviſhed on all characters and deſcriptions of men. No; our Apoſtle expreſsly declares that the celeſtial kingdom, with all the bleſſings of immortality, are prepared for thoſe only who *love God*, and obey the Goſpel of Chriſt.—No haters of God,—no deſpiſers of the Goſpel of Chriſt,—no ſcoffers at Religion,—no contemners of things ſacred,—none, whilſt they continue in a courſe of ſin and iniquity, in unbelief and impiety, have the ſmalleſt right or claim to theſe bleſſings.—Thoſe, who ſhall "inherit the kingdom," are ſuch as "are called to be holy." Thoſe, whom God "bleſſeth with all ſpiritual bleſſings in heavenly places in Chriſt Jeſus," are ſuch as are perſuaded to "dwell in the tents of Shem;" ſuch as he hath drawn with

with the cords of his love, and made a "willing people in the day of his power;" ſuch as "the day-ſpring from on high hath viſited," and "the womb of the morning" of the day of grace hath brought forth; ſuch as are poor in ſpirit, meek and lowly, mourners becauſe of ſin, hungering and thirſting after righteouſneſs, merciful, pure in heart, peace-makers, and perſecuted for righteouſneſs ſake: In fine, ſuch are they "who follow the Lamb whitherſoever he goeth;" and, whatever may betide, are faithful unto death.

Theſe, my brethren, are the choſen race "who ſhall aſcend into the hill of the Lord; and ſtand in his holy place."—But to give you ſome faint idea of their bleſſedneſs, we muſt call to our aid the *ſoul* of man with all its endowments and perfections, and the *body* with all its ſymmetry and beauties. And,

1ſt. The *Soul* of man, endowed with every perfection, furniſhes us with one idea of the heavenly happineſs. Though it is immortal, yet, while here below, it is dark and beclouded. It has vaſt deſires which the world cannot ſatisfy; and ſuch a thirſting as cannot be quenched, until it finds out the Fountain of Life. But in the heavenly ſtate all clouds of ignorance ſhall be blown over, and all the lightning and thun-

der which they contain paſſed away. All thoſe turbulent affections, thoſe violent paſſions which make men ſtorm as the winds, and rage as the ſea, "foaming out their own ſhame," ſhall be huſhed into a calm: thoſe covetous and murmuring *Gadarens*, and their ſwiniſh herd, ſhall be buried in a dead ſea.—All the wills, all the luſts of the fleſh, ſhall have a total and final circumciſion, when this great Sabbath of the Saints is come.

Then the ſoul ſhall be raiſed to the higheſt pitch of perfection, to which it is capable of arriving. It ſhall be endowed with a moſt extenſive knowledge and underſtanding, capable to diſcover and penetrate into all that can bring it pleaſure and ſatisfaction. Its capacities ſhall be wonderfully enlarged; and theſe ſhall all be filled.—The mind ſhall be filled with as much light, the will with as much love, and the heart with as much peace as they can poſſibly contain.—Faith ſhall be heightened into viſion;—hope ſhall be ſatisfied in poſſeſſion;—love completed in fruition, and peace conſummated in uninterrupted, immutable and permanent pleaſure.—The powers of the ſoul ſhall then be likewiſe rendered moſt extenſive, and, in ſome degree, reſemble thoſe of the Deity himſelf. Yea, it ſhall undergo a thorough and almoſt a total

total change. Out of weakneſs it ſhall be made ſtrong: Out of darkneſs it ſhall be tranſlated into a marvellous light: and from the depth of abaſement be exalted to the pinacle of honour, yea, "changed from glory to glory."

Nor ſhall the dignified ſoul reap leſs felicity from the bliſsful rewards with which ſhe ſhall be crowned: ſuch rewards as no other Religion, but that of the holy Jeſus, ever held out to mankind:—rewards moſt *ſure* and certain; being grounded on the immutable *love* of the Father, on the invaluable *purchaſe* of Chriſt the Son, and on the unqueſtionable *promiſes* of the Spirit of Truth and Faithfulneſs.—Believers have now the earneſt of theſe rewards; but the poſſeſſion is yet with Chriſt their head.—Nor are the rewards of bleſſedneſs only *ſure*, but they are alſo *great*; being no leſs than a *crown of righteouſneſs* that fadeth not away; a *kingdom* that ſhall never be raviſhed from them, and attended with an "exceeding weight of glory;" ſurrounded with which the ſaints ſhall ſhine forth as the brightneſs of the ſun, in the kingdom of their Father, then made over to them for an everlaſting poſſeſſion.—And as theſe rewards are *great*, ſo are they *full* and *complete*. No deſire remains unſatisfied; no wiſh unanſwered; no faculty unrepleniſhed; no ſin, no

ſorrow, no labour or pain unremoved; and no tears unwiped away. Yea, God ſhall make them drink of the rivers of pleaſure, and draw living water from the wells of ſalvation.

2dly. The *Body* alſo furniſhes us with the means of forming ſome conception of the happineſs of the heavenly inhabitants.—So long as the ſoul is clothed with the mortal body, that body conveys its infirmities and diſtempers to the mind.—It is a conſiderable time before the ſoul, that "candle of the Lord," ſhines at all in the dark lanthorn of the body; and when it begins to blaze forth, how ſoon does the lanthorn burn! With what dulneſs and liſtleſſneſs, with what heavineſs, wearineſs and languors, are our ſpirits now clogged, ſo that they can hardly ſoar above the earth we tread!—But, at the reſurrection of the juſt, all theſe ſhall be ſhaken off. Then ſhall the body be free from all thoſe blemiſhes and defects which here disfigure it. All its defilements and corruptions, its weakneſſes and imperfections, ſhall be left in the grave. It ſhall thence be raiſed incorruptible, and exempt from all thoſe diſeaſes which now threaten it; and which often render life undeſirable and irkſome. Nothing ſhall ever infeſt or annoy it; nor ſhall death any more mark his dominion in its deſtruction.—It ſhall alſo

alſo acquire new honours and dignities, with a glorious ſplendour reſembling that which adorned the face of the Hebrew Lawgiver, when he deſcended from the ſacred Mount;—or that which ſhone from the God-man, *Chriſt Jeſus*, in the day he was transfigured; and gave to his favourite diſciples a glimpſe of his heavenly glory. It ſhall be ſo furniſhed with angelick ſtrength as to be a fit partner for the glorified ſoul, with which it ſhall act without any defect, impediment, or infirmity whatever. And, being entirely of a ſpiritual nature, ſhall have no need of clothing or nutrition, but be perpetually preſerved and ſupported by the ſpirit of grace and glory.

Soul and body, after a ſhort ſeparation, being again united, at the reſurrection of the juſt, their reunion is for ever indiſſoluble: and thoſe dear, thoſe intimate friends ſhall mutually participate in all the pleaſures of eternity.—What theſe pleaſures are we cannot know, until we arrive at the celeſtial city; for "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."—But, as far as we can form any judgment of the glory and happineſs of the righteous, in the kingdom of heaven, be-

ſides what we have already obſerved, it ſeems to conſiſt in theſe following things,

1ſt. In a complete and comprehenſive *viſion* of the Godhead.—In our preſent ſtate of imperfection we ſee but in part, and know only in part: "but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part ſhall be done away." In the book of the creatures, in the glaſs of the world we can diſcover only ſome faint traces of the Divine Glory; we can perceive him but obſcurely.—In heaven we ſhall ſee him face to face, and know even as we are known.

But, if God dwells in light inacceſſible and full of glory, as the Scriptures deſcribe him, how ſhall ſuch weak-ſighted creatures be able to endure this glorious light, to which the brighteſt beams of the natural ſun, are but as the twilight, or dawn of the morning? How ſhall even an immortal eye be able to look on him and live?—For this our Lord hath provided.—"To him that overcometh" He hath promiſed to give "the morning ſtar;"* a light to ſtrengthen the eye for beholding his glory, with as much eaſe, as we can ſuppoſe the ſtars look on the ſun.—But it is from the glorified body of the Redeemer that the ſplendent majeſty of

* Rev. ii. 28.

JEHOVAH

JEHOVAH is reflected on us; it is in the face of Jeſus that we ſhall behold the glory of the Deity with complacence and delight; for there it ſhines forth bodily.——Him we ſhall ſee in righteouſneſs; and though not with an all-comprehending, yet, with a beatifick and repleniſhing viſion, which leaves no deſire of the ſoul unſatisfied.—Saints ſhall then be able to comprehend more fully "what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height of the love of Chriſt which paſſeth knowledge."——All the myſteries of redemption ſhall be unfolded to their raviſhed and admiring minds: All the intricacies, all the difficulties in the ways of Providence ſhall be unravelled; and ſhall afford freſh pleaſure to their enraptured ſouls.—Ineffable muſt the joy of the Saints be in beholding the "Father of Lights," by his own effulgent rays: in ſeeing "the Sun of Righteouſneſs" in the boſom of the Fountain of Light; and in feeling the exhilarating and eternal influence of the Holy Spirit ſpringing from both theſe Lights! —If a tranſient glance of God does now, at times, raiſe ſuch ſuperior delight in the ſoul, what muſt that be when we ſhall fix our eyes upon him who "is altogether lovely;" when we ſhall lie under the unchecked rays of the Deity, beating full upon us, and we, at the

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ſame time, ſufficiently ſtrong to receive and bear their ſplendour!—Bliſs beyond conception!

2dly. Another part of the Believer's happineſs in a future ſtate is—the full *poſſeſſion* and *fruition* of God.—Doubtleſs, God is now our God, by virtue of that gracious *covenant* into which he entered with his people.—He is ours by *promiſes* moſt ſure, moſt ample and permanent.—He is alſo ours in the *ſeeds of grace* and righteouſneſs; in the *firſt fruits of the ſpirit*; in comfortable and liberal *proviſions*; in powerful *providence*; in continual *protection*; and in ſpiritual *ordinances*. But all this is while we are at home in the earthly tabernacle, and abſent from the Lord: and while we hope for that which we ſee not.—Now, the Saints may have ſome fits of joy; but in heaven they ſhall have their fill. Now, they may enjoy a ſweet, but ſhort hour's communion with him whom their ſouls love; but there it ſhall be conſtant and uninterrupted. No ſinful or jarring paſſion ſhall diſturb the peace of the celeſtial inhabitants: for, as Bernard expreſſes it, "Our concupiſcible part ſhall be filled with a fountain of righteouſneſs; and our iraſcible with perpetual tranquillity." We ſhall enter into our *Maſter's joy*; and rejoice more in his happineſs than in our own. We ſhall be perfectly at leiſure for God; we

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ſhall ſee him and love him; we ſhall love him and praiſe him, time without end.

Whilſt here, we are in the condition of minors, and cannot actually enjoy our heavenly inheritance; but it is reſerved and kept ſafe for us: and at laſt we ſhall be admitted into full poſſeſſion.—As our *faith* ſhall be changed into *viſion*, ſo ſhall our *hope* into *fruition*.—Here we are in a waiting, expecting, longing, anxious, and languiſhing ſituation; but in heaven we ſhall be in a ſure poſſeſſion, in a plenary fruition of all that bleſſedneſs, of all that glory and dignity to which the covenant of Grace entitles us. No power is unoccupied; no faculty of the ſoul but is as full of God, as the ſun is of light, as the ſea is of water.—No wonder indeed that the Saints on earth wait, and long, and languiſh, for the poſſeſſion of this glorious and delectable ſtate; this rich "inheritance, which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reſerved in heaven for thoſe who are kept by the power of God through faith unto ſalvation."

3dly. Another part of that happineſs which awaits the ranſomed of the Lord, in the heavenly manſions, conſiſts in their being *transformed into the image and likeneſs of Chriſt*.—Though "now born again of water, and of the ſpirit;" though renewed in the inner man, and the

the whole nature changed, yet, that change is often hardly perceptible; and the divine likeneſs frequently appears but very faintly in Believers, while in this ſtate of imperfection. Here our graces are mingled with many corruptions. "The fleſh luſteth againſt the ſpirit and the ſpirit againſt the fleſh; and theſe are contrary the one to the other; ſo that we cannot do the things that we would."* We reſemble the Lord by the firſt-fruits of the ſpirit; but we are unlike him by the remains of the old man.—In heaven this difference ſhall be done away; and we ſhall be *wholly* like him: "for we ſhall ſee him as he is;" ſee his beauties unveiled; and, in beholding him, "be changed into the ſame image from glory to glory."—Here every faithful diſciple of Chriſt hath "his garments made white in the blood of the Lamb," being juſtified from all their iniquities, through faith in their divine Redeemer; but, when they ſhall be tranſlated to the Zion that is above, their faces ſhall ſhine as the ſun, and their raiment be whiter than ſnow.——Here, like poor common ſoldiers, ſome get one piece of armour, and ſome another. Job gets a *helmet of patience*, David a *girdle of truth*, and Peter a *ſhield of faith*, after having been trained up to

* Gal. v. 17.

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the uſe of them in many ſore conflicts and ſevere engagements. But, in the celeſtial fields, every ſoldier of Jeſus ſhall be clothed with the whole "armour of Light;" not to fight, but to triumph in; for God will dwell with them, and be unto them *All in all.*—As the image of the ſun is formed in the glaſs on which it ſhines, ſo the bleſſed, the glorified ſoul, by ſeeing God, by beholding the face of Jeſus, hath the perfect image of his holineſs and purity ſhed forth upon it, and becomes one with Chriſt, as he is one with the Father. How tranſporting is the thought of being transformed into the divine image and likeneſs; and of being "filled with all the fulneſs of God!"—"Verily there is a reward for the righteous."*

4thly. In the heavenly country, a great part of the Believer's happineſs will be in the full enjoyment of thoſe ineffable and unmixed pleaſures which ariſe from the *viſion* and *poſſeſſion* of God, and from their *likeneſs* unto him.—"In *his* preſence there is fulneſs of joy; and at *his* right hand are pleaſures for evermore;" pleaſures which will not ſatiate or cloy.—The fruit of the celeſtial paradiſe "is righteouſneſs and peace; and the effect of righteouſneſs, quietneſs and aſſurance for ever."——Being joined to the

* Pſal. lviii. 11.

Lord,

Lord, and become one ſpirit with him, "our peace ſhall be as a river; and our righteouſneſs as the waves of the ſea."

Certain it is that all earthly delights ſoon loſe their reliſh: terreſtrial joys ſoon pall the appetite, and produce loathing and diſguſt. But, in heaven, freſh joys ſpring up perpetually in the ſouls of the Redeemed: and the delights which they there enjoy never produce loathing, or cauſe a want of appetite for them.—An immortal ſpirit cannot be ſatisfied with the huſks of this earth. Let us have what we moſt earneſtly ſeek after, and long for; let us enjoy freely what we moſt paſſionately love and deſire; and we ſhall find that, in the poſſeſſion, it loſes much of its preſuppoſed worth; and that it does not yield us that delight in the enjoyment which our warm imaginations had formed.—Not ſo is it with the things that are above: Poſſeſſion enhances their value; and enjoyment makes us have a higher reliſh, and a greater deſire for the fruition of them.—Let us form the moſt exalted ideas of them that the human mind is capable of doing, let us raiſe our expectations ever ſo high, we ſhall ſtill fall ſhort in eſtimating their value; ſtill they will ſurpaſs our moſt ſanguine hopes, and vaſtly exceed our fondeſt wiſhes.—Indeed it muſt be ſo: for it is impoſſible that the chief

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and higheſt Good ſhould ever cauſe a ſatiety, or diſguſt, in the fruition; ſince it comprehendeth eminently in itſelf the particular perfections of all other deſirable things.—Poſſeſſing God we poſſeſs all happineſs.

5thly. The *nature* and *excellency* of that delightful *country*, where all theſe glorious things are reſerved for the Righteous, furniſh us with another idea of the Believer's felicity in a future ſtate.—In heaven, where Chriſt hath provided, prepared and furniſhed manſions for the eternal reſidence of his choſen people, will be diſplayed all the beauties and riches of nature.——The foundations of the celeſtial city are repreſented as garniſhed with all manner of precious ſtones; the walls of jaſper; the gates of pearl; and the ſtreets of pure gold. "I ſaw," ſaith St. John, "the holy city, New Jeruſalem, coming down from God, out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her huſband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven, ſaying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men; and he will dwell with them, and they ſhall be his people; and God himſelf ſhall be with them, and be their God. And God ſhall take away all tears from their eyes; and there ſhall be no more death, neither ſorrow, nor crying, neither ſhall there be any more pain: for the former

mer things are paſſed away;"* that is, all thoſe evils which we have ſeen, or ſuffered in this world, ſhall vaniſh, and never more be known: and, which is the greateſt felicity of all, no *ſin* ſhall be there; for "there ſhall in no wiſe enter into it any thing that defileth;" and, conſequently, no miſery, no curſe ſhall be there; "but the throne of God, and of the Lamb, ſhall be in it; and his ſervants ſhall ſerve him; and they ſhall ſee his face."—What this particular ſervice is, or wherein the employment of the Saints ſhall conſiſt, is impoſſible now to deſcribe. Suffice it to know that our ſervice ſhall be our unſpeakable pleaſure, and every way ſuitable to the glory and happineſs of that ſtate; and as much ſuperior to the nobleſt, and moſt delightful employments of this world, as the perfections of our bodies, and the powers of our ſouls ſhall then be above what they now are, in this ſtate of weakneſs and infirmity.

But how inadequate is nature with all her riches, and all her beauties, to give us any juſt idea of the New Jeruſalem! It muſt be glorious beyond all conception, beyond what the moſt ſoaring imagination ever formed!—There all the luſtre of Deity, all the glories of the Godhead ſhine forth unveiled. The Lord God Al-

* Rev. 21. 2, &c.

mighty

mighty doth enlighten it with his glory, "and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them that are ſaved ſhall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and their honour into it. And the gates of it ſhall not be ſhut at all by day; for there ſhall be no night there."—In a word, it is a *building* of God, a *houſe* not made with hands, a place where the Lord will reveal himſelf unto his people, and ſhow that glory to his Church of which they now can form no adequate idea. —Again,

6thly. *Society* furniſhes us with another image of the Saints happineſs in the heavenly Canaan. In the New Jeruſalem are the choiceſt and moſt noble ſpirits. There are Cherubim and Seraphim, Angels and Archangels, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apoſtles, Martyrs, with their glorious ſcars of honour, and "ſpirits of juſt men made perfect." —Of all that innumerable company the hearts and ſouls are one. No ſinful or diſorderly paſſions diſturb the tranquillity of that bliſsful Aſſembly. No envy, no malice, hatred or revenge can lurk in the breaſts of the heavenly inhabitants, whoſe hearts are love. And, above all, the glorious preſence of the Lord Jeſus Chriſt inſpires the Redeemed with a ſacred joy, and a holy ecſtaſy. With what ineffable delight do their raviſhed eyes behold him whom their

ſouls loved, now on his throne of Majeſty, diſpenſing his favours, and with ſmiles of benignity, infuſing gladneſs into the hearts of his ranſomed Ones; whilſt their tongues ceaſe not to celebrate his praiſe, and to aſcribe "bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto him that ſitteth upon the throne; and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever."—And, when this ſacred anthem ſhall fill the mouths of ſuch an innumerous and joyful Aſſembly, how will the wide arches of heaven echo back the delightful ſtrain!—"The Saints, joyful in glory, ſhall ſing aloud upon their everlaſting beds of reſt, the high praiſes of their God." And, though they may differ from one another in glory, as one ſtar differeth from another, yet there ſhall be no envying of one another's happineſs. All ſhall be ſatisfied; all ſhall join with one heart and voice in the praiſes of "him who liveth for ever and ever."

And as nothing ſhall be wanting to complete the happineſs of the Righteous in their Father's kingdom, I cannot help being of opinion, That the pleaſure which the Saints ſhall receive from meeting with kindred ſpirits, and thoſe who were near and dear unto them on earth, will add greatly to their felicity. *Luther*, when diſcourſing at Supper, the night before he died, obſerved, That as Adam, after his ſleep, knew

his

his wife to be "bone of his bone, and fleſh of his fleſh," ſo, after we awake, we ſhall not only be ſatisfied with God's image, but we ſhall know one another.—If Diagoras, of Rhodes, when he beheld his three ſons crowned, in one day, as victors at the Olympick games, died for joy in their embraces; if good old Simeon, when he held the child Jeſus in his arms, cried out, "Now, Lord, letteſt thou thy ſervant depart in peace; for mine eyes have ſeen thy ſalvation;"* what ineffable joy muſt the Saints experience, when they ſhall behold their beloved friends and relatives, and thoſe to whom they had been inſtrumental in bringing them to Chriſt, all crowned, in one day, with a diadem of glory, which ſhall never tarniſh or decay, and with whom they ſhall reign in bliſs through eternal ages!

Laſtly. And what crowns all that has been ſaid on the future happineſs of Believers, is—the *eternal duration* of it. "The mountains ſhall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindneſs ſhall not depart from thee, neither ſhall the covenant of my peace be removed, ſaith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."†—To conſtitute a perfect ſtate of happineſs two conditions are requiſite; namely, that it be *immutable*, and that it be *interminable*; that it can neither admit of a *change*, nor

* Luke ii. 29, 30. † Iſa. liv. 10.

of an *end*.—This is positively the case in respect to the state of the Righteous in the world to come; "For the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him."*—The gospel of Christ, which promises these things, is an *everlasting* gospel:—The Priesthood of the Mediator is *unchangeable*.—His kingdom is that which *cannot* be shaken or destroyed:—His sacrifice *abideth for ever*:—The redemption which he hath purchased is *eternal*.—Within is no moth, no rust, no seed of corruption: Without is no thief, no violence, no cause of decay.

And as the happiness of heaven shall be *everlasting* in its duration, so shall it be *infinite* in its degree. Accumulated years, and ages heaped upon ages, shall not diminish its length.—Whilst JEHOVAH is omnipotent to preserve his people; whilst there is mercy and truth in God to bless and reward his faithful servants; so long as God is our Father and Christ our Head; and so long as the Deity remains immutable, so long shall be the continuance of the Believer's happiness; and so long shall they possess and enjoy that glorious inheritance which is incorruptible and eternal.

Seeing that such a glorious and perfect state of happiness is reserved for the Saints of God in

* Psal. ciii. 17.

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the world to come, let us diligently uſe every mean, which infinite Wiſdom hath appointed for preparing, and making us meet to be partakers in this happineſs.—As we are candidates for a celeſtial crown, let us not degrade our dignity, or ſhow our folly, by raking in the dunghil of earth in ſearch of felicity. What a madneſs is it for intelligent creatures to build their hopes of happineſs on loſs and dung; on vanity and vexation; whilſt they have ſuch glorious things as thoſe to look after!—Surely none, who act up to the dignity of rational ſouls, will thus labour in vain; will thus ſpend their time and ſtrength for nought.—What is the world? What are all its riches and treaſures, its joys and pleaſures, when ſet in competition with the world to come, with the riches of eternity, and the joys of the heavenly paradiſe, which "eye hath not ſeen, nor ear heard," and of which we now can form no juſt or proportionate idea? All terreſtrial, all ſublunary enjoyments are fleeting, unſatisfying and worthleſs: yea, below all notice, in compariſon to the "things that are above, where Chriſt ſitteth on the right hand of the Majeſty on high," gladdening the hearts of his faithful ſervants through eternal ages.

If ſo, is it not worth your while, nay, is it not abſolutely neceſſary for you, and every candidate for heaven, to examine into your own hearts,

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in order to find out if you are among the number of thoſe who "love God, and are the called according to his purpoſe?"—It is only for ſuch as are born again, for ſuch as follow Chriſt in the regeneration, that the celeſtial kingdom is prepared. Heaven is the birth-right of holy ſouls: and none but thoſe, who keep his commandments, have a right to eat of the tree of life; and to enter in through the gates into the city of the New Jeruſalem.

But if the future ſtate of the Righteous ſhall be ineffably glorious and happy, that of the wicked ſhall be unſpeakably wretched and miſerable.—Think, O Chriſtians, think on the inexpreſſible horror, the cutting remorſe, the unutterable deſpair, that awaits the ſinner, who lives, who dies, without God, without Chriſt in the world!—How dark and diſmal will their proſpect be when hurried hence, when ſummoned to appear at the awful tribunal of a groſsly injured and highly incenſed judge!——How alarming is the very thought of "dwelling with devouring flames;" and of abiding "in everlaſting burnings!"—The ſoul ſhudders at the very idea!—Fly ſinner, while yet you may, fly to thoſe arms of Mercy which are ſtill open to receive you.—Fly on the wings of faith to the dear Redeemer, who is willing, who is able, who is mighty to ſave; and whoſe blood

cleanſeth

cleanſeth from all ſin.—Now, or never.—Live in Chriſt now; or, without him, die eternally. Now he waits to bleſs you with all ſpiritual bleſſings; and, on your acceptance of him, to put you in full poſſeſſion of them.

But, ſhall God do all this? Shall Chriſt prepare an incorruptible inheritance for your perpetual reſidence? And will you ſtill refuſe to love him, and to accept of his gracious offers?—Shall the world engroſs all your attention; and occupy all your time?—Is heaven, is eternal glory, is endleſs felicity not worth ſeeking after?—— Alas! This would appear to be the opinion of moſt men, if we were to judge by the outward actions of their lives.—How dreadfully hath the god of this world blinded the eyes, and perverted the judgment of ſuch!—But I hope "better things of you, and things that accompany ſalvation."

Thus, Chriſtians, I have now, as well as on former occaſions, endeavoured, though but feebly, to ſet before you the manifold advantages of a holy and virtuous life; and alſo the dreadful danger, and manifeſt inconveniencies attending a courſe of ſin and impiety. I have, in imitation of the Jewiſh Legiſlator, held out to "you life and death, bleſſing and curſing:" chooſe which you will: but be perſuaded; and "chooſe life;" that you may be happy in this world, and eternally

nally bleſſed in the world to come.—Doubtleſs, you all wiſh to live and be happy, ſaying, with Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my laſt end be like his."—But if you really, and in good earneſt, deſire the end, you muſt uſe the proper means, and take the way that leads to it. You muſt "become the ſervants of God, and have your fruit unto holineſs," if ever you expect that "the end ſhall be everlaſting life."—If you would enjoy the inheritance prepared for "the Saints in light;" it behoves you to "walk as children of light."—If you would come to the heavenly Zion, with the joyful company of the Redeemed, you muſt "be blameleſs and harmleſs, the ſons of God without rebuke, in the midſt of a crooked and perverſe nation:"——If you would "receive the end of your faith, even the ſalvation of your ſouls," "your converſation muſt be as it becometh the Goſpel of Chriſt."——Think ſeriouſly on what has been ſaid: And, "if ye know theſe things, happy are ye if ye do them."

FINIS.